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Uncensored Episodes
not in the Diary of
Samuel Pepys

by

Emma Beatrice Brunner

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This is Elizabeth Pepys' side of the story that Samuel Pepys jotted down day after day in his famous Diary. The delightful rascal is seen through feminine eyes and "my wife, poor wretch" emerges as a woman of lively resource and fascination, as well as *a woman in love with her husband.*

We already know, through the Diary, the wife who graced her lord's carriage when he drove abroad and trembled when he cast up the household accounts. Here we have the Elizabeth who "went in mohair" while Samuel treated himself to satin and velvet, who bore long with his susceptibility to feminine charms but who knew more about Samuel's affairs with Deb the kitchen-wench and the ladies he met at court and at the play than Samuel ever suspected. She was not above disciphering her husband's diary and acting on her discoveries!

The climax of this amusing story, involving the famous Nell Gwynn, may come near the truth of why Samuel Pepys discreetly decided to end his memoirs. Perhaps troublesome eyesight was not the reason!

This is a serious and exceedingly clever recreation of a delightful scene and vital personalities. One need not be a Pepys enthusiast to enjoy it.

Bio Pepys 100

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PART I

"My Wife, Poor Wretch"

CHAPTER I

EARLY morning in Seething Lane and the wife of Samuel Pepys, chiefly known as the poor wretch who ran his house badly, rustling in and out their rooms chasing the demon of disorder that seemed ever to pursue her.

Glasses of the night before were still on the table, holding the dregs of wine and the ashes of pipes; cinders and bits of charred wood in the uncleaned fireplace; books where they didn't belong; chairs in disarray; candles half burnt in grease-stained sconces and candlesticks.

"And he lamenting that his wife has nothing to do!" exclaimed Mrs. Pepys scornfully, trying to move an uneven pile of ragged music from the top of a brass-bound cabinet to an inside shelf where it belonged. " 'It's want of work,' says he, 'that do make me and all other people think of ways of spending their time worse.' "

Mary Mercer, coming down the stairs that led from above right into the parlour, her arms overfilled with books, interrupted the disturbed tenor of her mistress's thoughts to disturb them still more.

Never would she reach the last step in safety!

"I told you so!" With a cry that was smothered in confusion and clatter Elizabeth Pepys went down on her knees.

Loose sheets of paper had tumbled out of the books, blown hither and thither.

"It'll vex him into a fever if he knows," cried Mercer, reaching out this way and that.

A memorandum book lay face down, pages twisted.

"One of his journals," said Mrs. Pepys, grabbing it up.

Curves and half curves, lines and double lines, dots and dashes!

Mercer would certainly have wrung her hands if they had been free. "It's my mistake," she blurted out. "I thought to make one job of it!"

So he still used secret writing! His wife had a sudden sharp twinge of annoyed curiosity.

Mercer stood by plainly ill at ease, her eyes glancing upwards significantly. If he were to know that some of his precious writing had strayed out of his precious books there would be the devil to pay, they both knew that.

"Oh, well, anything for content's sake!"

Praise the Lord, the mistress had come to her senses!

"Here, put the pages back—here where they came from—and we'll say naught. Go 'long, place the books as he told you and stay quiet."

Certainly she knew Samuel kept a journal. Live with a man day in and year out, share his room and bed, dress and undress with him, comb his wigs and wash his dirty socks and not know? And she half French and wholly a woman?

Time and again she had heard him vow to drink no wine till he had entered his notes. He was forever bringing the old thing up to date with her help.

Oh, yes, in certain ways her memory was as good as his, better. Mighty disagreeable he was about it, too, frequently suppressing or ignoring her, as last night for instance, when she had sat and sat till her eyes and ears ached listening to him complimenting that painted hussy Pierce on her looks, and Knepp, the vulgar baggage from the King's House, on her singing. Lord, she could hear her sombre voice rolling in her ears now, some called it rich:—

> "Beauty retire—thou dost my pity move
> Believe my pity and then trust. . . .
> Believe my pity—"

Samuel's song over and over; both of them at the spinnet and him pleased to death, nodding and joining in, prompting, beating time, applauding.

"Faith, but that was a long weary evening!"

It was said as much to herself as to Mercer, in and out from the study.

"And Knepp's grown fat, she could scarce breathe, wheezed on the notes like this—"

Mrs. Pepys gave a *sotto voce* imitation of her—all off the key.

"There's other accomplishments besides singing," she threw out irritably at Mercer's disappearing back. "'Tis something to be able to quote from the classics, and the French classics at that. Till two in the morning I contained myself—"

So she had; then when she could no longer endure to be ignored and started to recite from "Le Grand Cyrus"—she that knew it from Volume One to Volume Ten—Samuel had checked her.

"Nothing to the purpose," said he loftily. Cassandra, Statira, Oroondate—all her gallant company of unmatched heroes and heroines he waved aside preferring to dally with Knepp, the—

She set her teeth upon the word and reflected that any one could get Samuel who could sing a song of his composing—and would. It was good the jade had a jealous husband— Mm—yes—even as Samuel had a wife who wasn't a fool.

At one time she had been too timid, too concerned, too ignorant to make the distinction. Then when gradually she had become sensitive to the sound of a female voice, to the swish of a petticoat, she had discovered a procession of petticoats changing like servants. He apparently as difficult to please in one as in the other. Some comfort that!

Mercer was back again. Deb, the new maid, was on her knees at the fireplace. Their mistress

flitted restlessly between the parlour and the dining-room, almost one room, so wide the connection, picking up something as though she intended to put it somewhere and laying it back after a minute from where she had taken it.

"Your master will one day go to Parliament," she announced to the girl cleaning the irons, to the woman dusting the furniture, to the green serge hangings, to the pictures and tapestries. "Ay, to Parliament to make a speech—a speech writ in plain handwriting as ever was—that any one can read. There's not a line of it I haven't by heart. Small credit to me, for Lord knows I've played audience often enough. High Chamberlain I've been, and Speaker, and the entire House itself! 'Tis dull stuff for the most part,—beyond the comprehension of woman. How many times have I heard that last and still been bid to listen! I'll warrant if I should be cut open this day, every word of it could be read on my heart! You'll find writing on the heart of many a woman. Oh, Queen Mary that had 'Calais' writ on hers, was not the first nor the last! Sometimes 'tis neck-bands—overstiffened—understiffened; sometimes 'tis pies—overdone—underdone; or again game in season—pheasants mayhap."

In one room and out the other she went with a rag in her hand, now lowering her voice, now raising it, apparently quite indifferent as to what reached her audience and yet somehow discriminating.

Pheasants!—Never would she forget the first time of having. Samuel finding his house mighty clean and neat, and his table very proper, and that it would hold nine or ten people well and eight with great room, had decided to housewarm half a dozen of their neighbours with a noble bill of fare.

A fricassee of chicken—Samuel explaining how it could be done so that never would it be discovered not to be all chicken. Then a leg of mutton boiled; a fine dish of carp, a side of lamb, lobsters, anchovies, leading up to the great dish of all—pheasants—just flown into season. And Bess in the kitchen that didn't know the difference between a pheasant and a hash of beef! And a new oven that did heat too hot!

From the far end of the room, removed from him by the length of the table, she could feel to this day his anxiety gripping her in waves. One minute too long of roasting and the world was at an end! Seizing the carvers with a glance in her direction that sent her heart bounding to become a lump in her throat, he buried the knife. The blood must run at its first touch!

"Many a man has been kept in good humour by so little as the rare meat of a bird, and many is the wife that's gone wrinkled over the same."

This she delivered nodding earnestly, her mood of resentment flickering out as plain common sense came to her rescue. She was married to an English gentleman who could drink and eat with the best, a

gourmet as he should be, even as all proper men. She was fond of good food herself and liked going about to dinners and suppers, but when it came to their own entertainments—

"Poor Samuel! He has a wife who doesn't share joyously enough his great hospitality and friendliness!" Uttered now with the queer little mocking smile of one who wanted you to know that she knew what was said of her, followed, as she was human, by a bit of self-justification though merely mumbled for her own satisfaction. Mercer was for the moment gone, and certainly she cared naught for the thoughts of the new maid, an ignorant country wench from Deptford, up the river.

So she went on quite under her breath: "And when his guests are leaving, off with them he goes for more of their delightful company, and so the house may be proper cleaned in his absence."

House cleaning! Her despairing little gesture was eloquent of a sudden new trend of thought.

Pausing near the mantel she picked up Samuel's flute, and dabbing at it with her rag of a duster, observed impressively:

"The trouble is it takes so many years before we get to knowing all, and then as many again before we know how to handle the all we know. I that was married at fifteen and Convent bred—though only for a fortnight, the Lord be praised—and the half of me French—praise the Lord again!—I know more than that two and two is four . . ."

Something, she couldn't have told just what, had rubbed her more out of sorts this day than usual. It wasn't altogether the scene of last night, for that was an ever recurrent one that she had dealt with in various ways, sometimes with a show of temper, sometimes with an irritating silence.

She glanced up the room. To be sure a new maid was ever a disturbance. She had to be instructed as now.

"Don't clang the tongs!"

The tone of her mistress said quite plainly that she herself could lay a fire without disturbing any one. The girl made no audible answer, but there was something of a protest in the curls escaping from under her cap—rebellious, red, the colour of bricks, but not dingy like town bricks. Mrs. Pepys put her hand up to her own hair, one of her irrepressible charms—always unruly, never smooth, and certainly not expected to be smooth now, so early in the morning. In the new mirror over the mantel she caught sight of herself—no more in order than the room. Her little jacket, ruffled with yards upon yards of lace, had a spot on it—more than one. They actually sprang to the surface as she looked. And her mob-cap was wilted; she must change the ribbons—no time ever for anything! She wondered if any woman ever looked well in the early morning, and found herself glancing again toward the fireplace. The girl couldn't be a day over seven-

teen—highly recommended—honest, respectful—always smiling—

"Indeed, I must cease frowning," said Elizabeth to herself.

She carried Samuel's flute over to the music stand beside the spinnet where it did not belong and there suddenly dropped it with a clang.

The sound of a heavy step recalled her, as it had many times of late, to the proud fact that she was the wife of an important man, a man of position, a man in daily conference with the big men of the town.

The room assumed a new air of confusion.

"His draft, girl! Tell Jane to make ready the ale and wash the radishes! And, Tom—Tom—boy—have you gone to the barber for your master's periwig? No? Mercy on us! He says no! Mercer, get you down and tell him to be gone! Lud, if something were to be wrong there—and it not proper combed! And his sword—his sword with the gold band? Has it been new furbished? And look to his coat, some one—the one with the gold buttons! Are the buttons tight sewn? And his hare's foot against the colic—the one with the joint—the other does no good. It must have a joint to it, and be fresh—wherever did I put it? Don't ever forget to hand it to him when he goes out. If he so much as holds it in his hand it chases the wind from his stomach— Wherever did I put it?"

Mercer to the books—the mistress to the music—chairs moved, tables looked under—

"Wherever do you suppose I—" And there it was just where she had placed it not ten minutes before.

And there was Samuel at the head of the staircase, a good-looking man though a trifle too heavy for his inches, full-blooded, over-fed, even gross—and, Heavens, in what a humour!

"The smoke,"—he sputtered,—"the smoke!"

So that was it! But of course it wasn't, there was too little—a mere whiff.

He groped his way down as though blinded by it, accompanying his steps with all the unpleasant noises that go to indicate choking. He crossed to the window, pushed it open, and then stood gasping, his short hair all mussed, fanning himself with the skull-cap he had pulled off his head.

A dramatic entrance—the sort Samuel loved! His household, where he should have peace, in a turmoil, while, beyond, a world of distinguished men waited eager to hang upon his words.

"Smoke eating into the throat of a man that has now to defend himself before the greatest in the country! Smoke poisoning his lungs on this day when the Duke of York, the King's Council, the entire Navy—"

Words failed him—there were times however when even Samuel Pepys didn't need words.

"You should lay the coals further back," cried his wife to the girl at the hearthstone.

But apparently she could not shift the blame, not while she herself was there with ears to hear.

Their over-crowded parlour, at least it seemed so to Elizabeth Pepys, had served as a battlefield more times than they could count. Round after round had been fought there, she up, he down; she down, he up. It was his turn now. With the Duke of York in one sleeve and the Navy in the other he had the centre of the stage.

He wanted to know how she'd like it if the issue went against him. If he were turned out of office—if, after all, he were not summoned to Parliament?

"What would you live on, madam? Who would pay your debts?"

Oh, he had plenty of horrible thoughts to present to her as he strode up and down, pausing every now and then for her to make some answer.

Smiling indulgently she took refuge in dignified silence, broken most inopportunely by her over-joyous, improper, little long-haired spaniel rolling down the stairs, yelping noisily, leaving a trail behind her that led to Samuel's very feet.

For the next few minutes no one was dignified, certainly not the master, chasing, nor his wife, mopping.

"Foul beast!"

Breathless, she panted out: "Every one has a

dog, the ladies of the court, the Queen—only yesterday you were admiring the King's."

"They're different," he muttered.

"The King's are but just as others," said she with what one might call sweet acidity.

Certainly it was not a tone to restore good humour, nor indeed was it so intended. So far she had held herself in control, determined to yield to anything to prevent coming to a height—his expression. For ten years he had been saying and unsaying it. Keep the peace! But he wouldn't let her! That was Samuel. Words—words—words!

"You have no idea of the thoughts of a man lying awake!"

"No, but I know those of a woman!"

"Yes, worries for the lacing of your new gown—and the steps of the last French dance."

"And what it is to have a husband snorting and grunting—in and out!"

"Pish—pish!"

"And me that sat up with you till past three!"

"Would you have me sleep while my enemies lie awake planning my destruction? The honour of the Navy lies in the balance—the money out of which you live, that pays for the clothes you wear."

"And yours," she snapped.

Their eyes flashed unpleasantly, her brown ones grown almost black; his blue ones, steel.

"The coach you ride in!"

"Ours!"

She didn't care what casualty confronted them now, nor how important his well-being might be. Her temper was in no better control than his, but no worse, she'd swear to that!

"Your husband that has pulled himself up from nothing," he threw out. Which meant above all that he had pulled her up with him, and all her family: her brother Balty who was always in debt; her mother who was always ailing; her father who spent his life trying to invent things like smokeless chimneys, never succeeding. Samuel on the subject of her improvident family was never agreeable, and unfortunately entirely justifiable. She lapsed again into silence. He had been generous to them in spite of everything—she must not forget that.

"Shut that damned window," he shouted and strode, growling, up the room, his morning gown flying, the cap replaced on his hair, all awry.

At his back she made an involuntary grimace and longing to retort—"Do it yourself"—made no retort whatever—just stood pouting, hesitating.

Calling herself a fool she began to consider his worries, which were after all hers, and in view of them to wonder if it might not be her duty to placate him. "In the circumstances—ay, verily—" A shrug of her pretty shoulders expressed all.

She advanced slowly toward the window and found that the wench Deb had left the fireplace and was standing beside it. Taking the master's command to herself she had already pulled it to.

He looked at her and grunted twice, once in surprise, once in approval.

His wife looked at her and grunted too, quite differently.

"You may go," said she. "See that your master's draft is ready and bring it to him."

"As amiable a wench as ever I saw," said Samuel; "neat appearing and pretty. You should instruct her even as you might a daughter."

Oh, if she could only hurl something at him! She picked up a book—there was always a book in that house ready to hand—and clenching it tight she muttered under her breath: "The new wench indeed! A country hussy! Pretty? Faugh!"

Turning her back upon him she flounced up the room and then with a sudden movement, having collected all her forces, faced him, determined at last to say what she thought of him—determined at all costs—

"The devil take the little fool!"

She was so startled that her fingers unclenched and out of them the book dropped with a bang.

Samuel was standing at the far end of the room picking at his flute, sounding it with his lips, running his fingers over its keys, damning the creature Deb up hill and down dale.

"Threads—threads from her rag sticking in it—the country slut!

"—Tootle tootle too—tootle tootle too—"

"It was not the wench," said Elizabeth—not over loud to be sure, yet loud enough to deem it a wise moment to flit out of sight and leave him tootling.

Outside in the pantry there was the girl again, stirring, sugaring.

No fault to be found, she had been despatched for the same.

"Pull your cap forward over your hair—further—you must go neater. Take the master's draft in and then go below."

When she followed on the girl's footsteps, not two minutes behind her, he was sitting in front of his goblet, communing with the surrounding unresponsive air.

"Too much sugar and too little spice," he observed gloomily. Then in a manner as aggrieved as though some grudging person had robbed him of it, he declared that his appetite was gone, spoiled; not to be brought back even when with the flicker of a smile she presented a small bottle with a sieve top. He waved it away, but less disagreeably—despairingly rather, as if to say, "No good—neither that nor anything—no good." Presently he confessed he was vexed and sickish, and in all his life before never in so much trouble.

Frankly apologetic now, genuinely in earnest, craving encouragement, sympathy, advice, he revealed his anxiety as to money, and as to the out-

come to his reputation of the enquiries that Parliament had set on foot.

"I've been huddling as best I could some more notes for my discourse," said he.

"May the Lord bring it to a good issue," said she, choking back from her lips a brain load of unpleasant thoughts. He needed her—and she, poor fool, poor wretch, stood ready, as ever, at his elbow.

She pushed the radishes over to him. Nibbling at one stimulated his thirst, and he began to feel more like himself.

The ale was not so bad after all. He mightily wished his companions in the Navy were as good.

"That man Penn, with his pretense of sanctity—and Sir John, the doting old fool, and Brouncker, the pestilential rogue!"

Comptroller, treasurer, deputy-treasurer, purveyor, inspector—corrupt, all corrupt, rotten-hearted, false, underhand—

Dissecting them and their weaknesses seemed to restore belief in himself.

Up and down the room he strode, presenting the situation, his own end at least, more and more hopefully.

After all they relied upon him for their great defense—it rested in his hands.

He paused before his wife.

"Shall I go over it once again—just the beginning—eh? Could you listen?"

Could she? She smiled and screwed up her eyes till they were narrow slits filled with a mischievous twinkle.

"If you would put on your coat, Samuel, and your periwig, the effect would be better! It does make a difference. You're a fine appearing man when you're dressed; as personable as any—"

"Mayhap it is a help," said he in the tone she loved, a tone that seemed to imply she was ever in the right, the tone with which he had first wooed and won her.

"My wife and I once more friends." She remembered that from his journal at the time when he'd read her bits of it. His journal! They used actually to make up in its pages. Mm—and then to bed and to sleep with his head on her shoulder. Not lately—lately he had only come to her room on rare nights—

CHAPTER II

"THERE is this to be said about Samuel—he certainly takes thought of naught but himself when he is about this business of speech making."

His wife contemplated him with admiration, indulging in the typical reflections of one playing audience at an oft repeated rehearsal.

"Suppose it was me—and him sitting in my place and me prancing up and down? I know well his lips would curve, and his eyebrow, the left after its habit, raise itself—which same would worry me."

She kept her own eyebrows still and, for the hundredth time, pretended she understood what it was all about.

Victualling and contracts; figures and dates; so many barrels of the Sovereign's powder, so many cases of the Sovereign's ale—

She was flattered to be of any assistance and she tried to look interested, but occasionally her mind wandered.

Mrs. Pierce had suggested puffs for her hair, puffs set in on wires. It would be pleasant to have a try with them and with the new short skirts. What an age to live in! Shocking! Everything changing—no old London left! All things considered

perhaps it had been a mistake to be painted solemnly as a saint (Samuel's idea!) by young Hales. Nice looking young man Hales—so polite—so interested. And he had never seen her at her best. She must contrive somehow to let him know she was not puritanical—anything but that! With a painter's eye he had seemed to discern that under her whisk—

"What are you smiling at?"

"I—I smiling, Samuel! How could I? Do it again—the light is in my eyes!"

In brocaded coat of deep magenta with gold buttons, lace frills and furbished sword, in his most elaborate periwig, not so dark as the King's, more brown like the colour of his natural hair—he indulged in the antics of any speech maker in front of his mirror or his wife.

Two men she vowed in one husband! Well, perhaps that was what made him so attractive—Mr. Pepys of the Admiralty, serious, weighted with affairs, a loyal servant preaching patriotism, swearing allegiance, proudly bidding witnesses called against him, to say what they knew to be true. And her uncertain Samuel, strutting about, eager for admiration, a very boy in his dependence upon her judgment, her that had but two days since advised him to stand up to the lords—her—

She tightened his sword belt so he could reach easily the hilt, called for a table for his books and then returned to her seat and her thoughts.

Two men—one of them she had learned ever to be watchful of. Not to be watchful, not to wonder where one's husband spent his time while not in his office, not to suspicion him one minute and trust him the next was inconceivable.

"What do you think, eh?"

Something in her expression had brought Pepys to a stand-still. His wife followed straight to his feet, lavish with praise; glowing, triumphant—the woman to whom he turned at the crucial moment! Side issues the others—not serious—passing fancies—

"You will do it better still when you have an audience! Do it now over from the beginning. Mercer—Deb—Tom—Jane!"

She summoned the household, bidding them range themselves in seemly fashion about the room.

Mercer, informed as to the why and wherefore, responsible for the behaviour of the others, aloof as became her position of confidential woman, was entitled to a seat. Tom, the boy, stood shuffling, unused to a parlour with a turkey rug, scarce able to find room for his two feet. Plain to be seen he'd as soon they'd kept him cleaning out on the leads. Sidling up next him was Jane, every visible part of her over-red, pulling her sleeves down with rough hands over big arms, awkward—perspiring. Followed Deb, the new one—hard to describe. So grave, so small for a country baggage. Stupidly young, she sat down on a low stool and looked about

with a singularly frank stare out of long unshadowed blue eyes—strong eyes, not a sign of a wrinkle above or below, not a downward line to her button of a mouth.

Mrs. Pepys, with a shrug, let her remain seated. There were other matters more important—

"And here is Will Hewer!"

Glad to see him she was—dear Will Hewer, ever an admirer of hers, staunch and true.

She smiled and then distinctly sniffed. He had been making a tour of the Coffee Houses—from Old Fish Street to Covent Garden, from the Swan to the Rose—gathering up as he went the stench of tobacco and the rags of gossip.

If the scene upon which he came now amused him in the least he gave no sign of it. The master strutting and posing—the mistress stage-managing him—the awe of the servants! He took off his wide-brimmed hat and stood stolid, grave, a young man in snuff-coloured coat and breeches, with wide grey eyes and dullish brown hair, his own, falling long on his shoulders over a dun-coloured cape.

The matter that absorbed him was serious;—the Navy accused, its chief clerk on the defence, his own position as secretary to the great man in jeopardy.

Presently he was calling off the groups he had seen by name, telling what each man had to drink; how this one had looked at him and that one hadn't;

hints and whisperings he had caught; words he had guessed, enemies he had glimpsed.

Pepys stood nodding. He knew them and their ways, all of them professing eagerness as to Dutch tidings; begging for latest news of the Express from France; belching opinions as to plays and poets.

"But under their breaths, man, under their breaths!" he snorted.

Ay, that was it!

"They are all agog for great happenings," said Will Hewer presently, and then stood uneasily silent—the air of a man bottled up.

"Say on," cried Pepys. "I must have truth, truth—and precious little there is of it in this age and world! What more?"

Hesitantly, quite as though he were to blame, he said:

"The place was full of discourse that the officers of the Navy shall be all turned out."

Elizabeth's heart stood still. Her husband discredited! In this plight and she to think or care about his gadding! What matter where he took his pleasures if only he might still have heart for them? She didn't expect him to be a John Evelyn. Heaven forbid! Reforming ways and inveighing against manners, never looking at any woman, not even his wife. No, she'd sooner be wed to her Samuel and hear him tell of glutting his eyes with the beauty of Lady Castlemaine—ay, and even

know how thrilled he was to dream that he held her in his arms.

"They'd never turn out Samuel," she cried, "after all he has done—never Samuel!"

"They all rely upon you, sir."

"God knows they have reason," Pepys replied proudly, all his years in the Navy office back of him.

"I told them you were ready."

"I am."

"And he is magnificent!" cried Elizabeth. "You've not heard him, Will Hewer, since yesterday. Listen now—hold your peace all! You will never hear the like again! From the beginning, Samuel!"

"Lords and Gentlemen!"

Elizabeth loved that part. And so did Samuel himself. It was something to come before the House, even if one was summoned to it to defend oneself—even if one might not succeed.

Succeed!

He threw back his head and began. The speech itself being largely figures and presenting much less chance for real oratory, he lingered over the introduction.

"Let me venture to recite that in the service of my King—of my King—"

"Here there will be an interruption of applause! Samuel, you must be ready for it!"

He was, and grateful to her for the suggestion. A few more lines and then:

"Does my voice sound clear? Be honest!"

"The voice will come out right enough with the occasion," said Hewer. "It is the early morning air that is against it."

Not so his wife. If there was aught she could do to contribute to his success she was there to do it. He was husky, and no mistake.

"Here, take this fresh-strained flummery caudle. It will help the throat. You must take it regularly till to-morrow."

Poor Samuel, he wanted flattery, he wanted at this eleventh hour to be told he was perfect; he wanted what the ignorant round-cheeked Deb was giving him—open-mouthed wonder, unstinted admiration. Her eyes, clear as a pane of window glass, were upon him—him that was to speak with his Majesty the King—him with the gorgeous clothes and the gleaming sword! One could well nigh hear the wench recounting it with awe, with tremors of exultation, of gratitude. That she should have the luck to be permitted to serve in the house of such a man!

Sometimes one's wife was an over-solicitous nuisance! Samuel waved his aside impatiently, and resumed:

"In our City's dire need, when in one week nine thousand died—eight thousand of the plague—"

If there was anything in the world about which

Hewer was positive, it was figures. He shook his head.

"Seven thousand, sir—seven thousand four hundred. Six thousand of the plague."

"It sounds so well—nine thousand! It has a ring!" With that Elizabeth stepped back into favour.

"Lud, will there be any there present that will know different?" she added, hitting the nail on the head with almost uncanny insight.

And now, after a few dull paragraphs, Samuel had come to a favourite moment—a moment she knew well, a moment they both counted on for effect:

"When by day and by night my ears were filled with the tolling of the bells on Lumber Street; when there were not twenty people from end to end, and not fifty on the Exchange; when neither meat nor drink was safe; when my brewer's house was shut—my baker gone—"

"Hsh," said Mrs. Pepys softly.

Mercer was trying to keep Tom from shuffling and Jane from sniffling, and Deb—the mistress's glance took her in where she sat seemingly all unconscious of aught but the master's voice.

"While sickness and death thickened about me, I remained at my office. Others have taken their turn at the sword—and I did not grudge to take mine of the pestilence—I stayed at my post in the city—"

Elizabeth recalled the unspeakable horror and dulness of it! Samuel having to be abroad in the interest of the office; she all day at home, charged never to leave the room where his gold was locked, night or day, unless Will Hewer were by. Then later she helping to carry their money and huge bundles of his precious papers to safety.

But he was well beyond that now—he had gone on to:

"Me your servant—me the servant of his Majesty—me— And so on and so on—" said Pepys at last. "Where is that caudle?"

His wife handed it, schooling herself to be as gracious as though she had never been repulsed.

"'Tis as you like it—tasty with ale and orange flower water—"

"There is naught then to suggest?"

He but asked to have his ears tingle once more to praise unqualified. Any fool would have known that.

The servants were speechless. Mercer gravely blank, Tom broadly grinning, Jane more red of face every minute, smirking; Deb Willett's eyes were suspiciously moist. Timidly she lifted the edge of her apron—a pretty gesture almost as eloquent as words.

Samuel caught it as did his wife. Perhaps that was the reason she faltered out:

"You have a beautiful speech, Samuel. Mightily moving—mightily, but—"

"But what?"

"I was just thinking—wondering—I may be wrong—but would it perhaps be more beautiful if some one else should speak a bit of the praise that is in it?"

"Who? Oh, you poor wretch—who?"

"Some other man—a friend—what matter who?" She turned to Will Hewer.

"Each man does it for himself, madam. None other—ever. It is the custom," said Will Hewer positively.

"Laa, it was on my mind and I said it!"

To keep in favour with a man there was after all only one way.

"You're magnificent, Samuel—magnificent!"

She reached up to his lips and hid the coldness of his response by pretence of being herself occupied with a fleck of dust on his coat.

"Now to the Swan, into the midst of my enemies," said he, waving her aside, "for a cup of chocolate to settle my stomach. Something is wrong within me—I think it was the fowl I ate last night; it was a nasty bird! Damn the cookmaid! A plague on all such!"

Plainly he was over worried and so entirely excusable. Poor Samuel!

His wife, at her wit's end to put him back in good humour, presently crossed to the window from where she announced with genuine excitement:

"People are waiting for you to come out! I see them at the crossing! It looks like all London! Look, Samuel, look!"

"Keep back!" he growled, apparently observing for the first time that she had shifted her morning jacket for an old black moiré waistcoat, and a short petticoat laced most basely with discarded odds and ends. "I cannot endure to see my wife in that garb standing where all the world can see her!"

The world! She forgave him knowing full well she did but serve as a means to hide his too evident pleasure. The world at the door of Samuel Pepys!

"Come on, Will Hewer."

Over to the other side of the room and down the stairs with all the dignity he could summon, past his gaping household he strode.

Pausing in the entry below he drew himself up as high as the good Lord would let him, which was not high enough, for he still seemed over weighted by his great wig and his full-skirted coat.

His wife, all solicitude and pride, leaning over the balustrade, waving a last farewell, suddenly remembered he had changed his clothes to this suit, a new one since yesterday, the first time of wearing. And he had complained of colic, and in all the excitement he had forgotten to take a pill of turpentine—

"Samuel, Samuel, your hare's foot! Samuel—one minute!"

Not a murmur of response from below. She peered over and met his backward glance (Vexed to

the blood!) as he stepped out under the neighbours' eyes peeping from behind the blinds—Lady Minnis —Lady Penn—the servants—one could be certain all were peeping.

Samuel going without his precious charm! She made a quick dash to the table where it had lain not a few minutes since—she herself had placed it there ready to his hand— Gone!

"The master has it, madam. You did bid us not to forget, madam—"

The new maid stood bobbing, waiting for commendation—the new maid with whom one must seem pleased, even if for no proper reason in the world, one wanted to box her ears.

CHAPTER III

AFTER endless committee meetings Samuel had gone at last to appear before the House itself. He was a coming man, no doubt of that! As things were shaping themselves it was not unlikely that some day he would become a member of Parliament, or he might even purchase a knighthood.

His wife in her dressing-room was undecided as to the length of her side locks, a most important matter, for on them the beauty of one's headdress rested.

"The curls in front must be short as the fashion is; mine are quite as they should be—quite—long here at the sides and then longer—falling at the back."

She twisted to see the effect in her incredibly small mirror and thought aloud. It was a habit of hers—not to be commended—got from the long time she had been without friends; no one to confide in but Samuel, who was not always sympathetic, and the maids, who had little understanding of the heart of a lady.

Now at last, he having conceded that she lived too lonely, she had her own confidential woman, Mercer, a decayed merchant's daughter, who could

pull one's stays right vigorously, lace a bodice straight, dance a jig, or sing a tune to Samuel's fiddling. Mercer was not ideal, but she was better than no one and she had a right proper way of effacing herself, the way for people in service. When Elizabeth and her husband shouted at each other every sort of name, they could forget her existence or remember it, as they pleased.

Elizabeth happened now to be alone in front of her mirror.

"I don't care that"—she couldn't snap her fingers because they were otherwise employed sending a bit of wool around the rouge pot—"not that for the opinion of Mr. John Evelyn. He does not approve of paint. 'Paint,' says he, 'is a most ignominious thing, fit only for prostitutes.' But, Lord, when one has seen his wife!" She waved a hand expressively. "'Tis all very well to go as nature intended if one is married to a man like Evelyn, but when one's husband is quite other, and one has made up one's mind to keep him—"

She remembered the first time he had called her "poor wretch"; that was before ever she had suspicioned that to get a husband and to keep him was not one and the same thing.

"One, two, three—bow!"

In that very house, below stairs, she was having a dancing lesson. Her one thought to please Samuel, to show him how she could twist and turn and step

out this way and that, as they did at Court. He was forever coming home with tales of the disreputable women who held sway there, long before she knew their ways and manners for herself.

Mr. Pembleton, the dancing man, dark and good looking, directing;—Will Hewer, dumb with admiration, standing in the wide open doorway.

"One, two, three—bow!"

"Perfection!" cried Pembleton.

She wished he would not speak so loud. She had been conscious of Samuel stealing up the stairs—she, who had just said: "If he were only here to give us a tune on his fiddle!"

She whispered to Will Hewer to go after him. He knew—he understood—he had always known—he who had the run of the house. Then she, back again, bowing, turning, twisting, without question pleased, after the nature of any woman under admiring eyes, though protesting.

He, the dancing man, was not to be downed—not he! She rather liked that about him.

"I am quite satisfied to do it well enough," said she.

And then, all of a sudden, she would swear without any invitation on her part, he took her hand and pressed it, pressed it like Samuel, only there was something new in the touch of this man! She cried out in terror, and then having done so, felt like a fool.

"It is part of the dance, madam," said he stiffly, returning to the attack.

"So hard?"

It seemed she had given him, all unawares, another invitation.

"Faith," said he, "if the man has proper appreciation of the woman!"

Poor little innocent! She feared it might be anything but proper. She withdrew her hand. And then Will Hewer returned, pale, with a warning in his eyes. She could see him now—dear devoted Will Hewer!

"Dance," said he, "dance!" Only time for that.

Samuel appeared behind him.

"I heard you talking," said he, "so I knew the dance was finished."

"We have but just begun!"

"Begun and ended!"

"But, sir—"

"I have need of this room. My wife doubtless forgot to tell you—for a conference."

Her husband making a fool of himself!

And then one of those scenes one never forgets. Will Hewer showing Mr. Pembleton out—Pembleton smiling scornfully—Samuel striding the room and hurling reproaches.

"There you have made me do it—made me bare my heart and make myself the talk of the town! Jealous of my wife with her dancing man! He will spread it to the world!"

Words upon words, hot and fast:

"Your duty to me—"

"I do my duty!"

"Your dancing master,—and that French coxcomb, Somersett,—and that other, the Lieutenant!"

Her poor little work basket, the one he had brought her himself from Holland—how it suffered that day—he kicking it from one end of the room to the other!

"The devil take it and you out of my sight!" And so on and so on—

She weeping upstairs—he raging downstairs. Will Hewer the messenger between the two—a shadow flitting from her closet to his.

To her: "You're breaking his heart." To him: "She's weeping her eyes out. It is impossible you should think harm of her!" To her: "Go down and speak to him!" Then at the proper moment disappearing.

For there she was.

"I thought I heard you call—"

"I, madam?"

"'Tis too bad, Samuel!"

"Too bad indeed!"

"I thought once married I should have all sorts of liberties."

"And break my heart—"

That brought her trembling to her knees. Above her head he kept on—his work—his wife—her dancing man—his poverty—his devilish jealousy—

"God forgive me! But I cannot calm myself by all the reason I have!"

This was love! How many times since she had told herself that same!

"I'm overcome," he protested, "carried out of myself and off my feet by my devilish jealousy which I pray God may be foolish, but it makes a very hell in my mind. You must give up to me—give up—"

And then the reconciliation—she, poor wretch, poor fool—(oh, she knew now!) renouncing—renouncing. In his arms she ridiculed the dancing man, blamed herself for the attentions of a certain French coxcomb, gave over all desire to perfect herself in the dance. He was her lover—he alone—she would send for Pembleton and show him! She would deny herself to all! She would live for Samuel alone!

Self-sacrifice, renunciation for the man she loved,—what could be more glorious! She went on and on, till she had not a friend in the world. A hired woman her only confidante—a succession of hired women with musical ability. Lord, how she herself had tried to sing! While he that had once quoted to her in church—"Full well she sang the service divine"—now grew vexed because her ear was so bad! She could draw a little and even tint the same with colours from her palette, but it proved irritating work. It meant sitting before a board in her closet, while below she would hear voices,

laughter, playing, singing, a pause—long continued. Then she'd burst into the room with a feeling that she had interrupted more than the music.

Samuel had gone on and on, too—not renouncing. Oh, no—*au contraire!* Occasionally she lapsed into French just for the pleasure of it.

"By the good Lord's mercy my curls are natural," she exclaimed at the end of a long survey.

Not a sign of irons in the confusion before her but powder a-plenty,—sparkling for the hair and plain for the face,—essences and pomades of all sorts amid a chaos of false tresses, puffs and patches, of which Samuel disapproved, bottles and jars. Thrown to one side lay a dog's collar, bits of ribbon, a twist of pearls to hold the hair in place, wreaths and roses; a pinner (torn), a kerchief (soiled), a memorandum with the words of a song on it.

With a sudden faint smile Elizabeth murmured:

"Sweet disorder—tempestuous petticoat—careless shoe-strings—"

Oh, if only once again she might hear Samuel's voice fitting sweet lyrics to her small vices (leaving things about was one), pouring into her ears the true philosophy of a servant as at the time when he was head over ears in love with her halo of midnight hair, her eyes that held points of amber, and

her soft body that baffled even him to describe. Ah, yes, well—

She smiled into her mirror. The smile added to the beauty of her face, French in type—not in the least English—dark, animated. In repose her mouth pouted. It is true her teeth were not good—the only English thing about her according to her French father. But whose were? Even the Queen's wronged her mouth by sticking too far out. And teeth were such a trouble! When she held her mouth so—perhaps that was the reason of the pout. She took note of her rounded little chin; at this angle it certainly might be said to dimple. And her eyes—full-lidded, brown, wide apart, brows well arched—just right—really a great beauty. Had not John Hales, when doing of her portrait, remarked them? Indeed he had! That was one reason why Samuel didn't like him. She knew—one reason why he said now he could not be compared to Sir Peter Lely, or that other Dutchman that was the Queen's choice.

She contemplated her nose critically. John Hales had said it had cost him as much work as another's face—at least so Samuel had told her. But Samuel—

To be sure, it might possibly have been a trifle thinner, but it was comfortingly straight, and after all she never was thin herself. She wished she were taller; perhaps if she did her hair differently and had a pair of those new shoes with very high heels

and square toes—Lord knows she needed them—

At that moment her rouge pot flew out of her hand, which might have accounted for her sudden flash of ill humour. A pair of almond-shaped eyes, big, liquid as her small spaniel's, met hers in the mirror.

"Your gruel water, madam. Mercer sent it, madam—"

"Put it down. Mercer should have brought it herself."

It was Deb Willett with cheeks glowing red.

"You look as though you had been running."

"Oh, no, madam."

"Running in the wind."

"Oh, no, madam."

"If you want to be good at service—"

"Yes, madam—"

"You must pay attention to your work—think of naught else; you must not be thinking of your looks."

"Oh, madam!"

"Nor contemplate yourself in the mirror—as now."

"Oh, madam! It was you, madam, you that are so beautiful—your colour—"

Drat the wench! The whole pot only cost sixpence!

"Has it stained the rug?"

"No, madam."

"Get something, wash it up; use your wits—you're old enough—"

The girl vanished leaving behind her a most unpleasant feeling. One needed the gruel water to the last drop!

The minx! She could hear the swish of her skirts going down the stairs, running, tripping. Lord, what was she so pleased about? The fowl to be dressed, vegetables to be peeled, fish to be scaled, water to be carried up—heavy pails and pitchers, odds and ends to be cast out of the window, up and down—

The girl was back, on her knees—smiling. A ray of sunlight had come in with her, the first in days, a rare, cursed, revealing ray. It struck the side of her mistress's cheek and jerked her forward rudely. A new line and nearing twenty-eight—or was it twenty-nine?

"Pull the curtain, girl, and then wipe over there; —look—never mind the carpet."

The sun had danced to the cabinet disclosing a mountain of dirt where before was nothing noticeable.

"Remove the gruel; it has unsettled my stomach —so—that is all."

Elizabeth Pepys had never heard of an inferiority complex, and here, all of a sudden, a country chit had presented her with the problem dressed up in a

dish of sour grapes—an ignorant country baggage!

"Mercer! Mercer!"

The tone of her voice brought the woman running from below stairs.

"That girl—you must instruct her."

Mercer nodded.

"Jumping, skipping,—she's not the only one that has ever been sixteen! Faith, when I was her age I had been a year married."

"Yes, madam."

Mercer was anxious to get back to her work. A busy day ahead and the mistress in so strange a humour—keeping her there listening to the history of her early married life, bits of it thrown out between dabs at her eyes from a fresh bottle of Maydew; beginning with the master's wooing of her, setting him up on the highest heights, pulling herself up beside him.

"Think of it—me a child, an inexperienced impressionable baby, and him that had been to Cambridge, a B.A. with knowledge of Latin and Greek —him that had been elected to a scholarship—him that could drink and talk with the best! Where's the stopper? Oh, there!"

"I must go back," said Mercer, "the hours follow faster than one thinks—"

"He was a wonderful man, a writer, he had written romances, poetry! Mad for me he was, and me a mere nobody without jointure or expectations!"

Mrs. Pepys, left to her thoughts, went on:

"And he with his connections! 'My cousin, Sir Edward Montague, once removed—'"

For weeks after they were first married Samuel had trained her to the sound of his title: "We must do this because of Sir Edward, or that because of Sir Edward—our home is given us by Sir Edward—"

So they went to love in a garret in Axe Yard, Westminster. One maid of all work, her husband being a beginning clerk—fifty pounds a year salary or thereabouts.

Though she had no head for figures, and never had in spite of his teaching, she soon enough found that no money meant all the things she hated and none of the things she liked. Many a dinner of pease porridge for instance, which she loathed; and a time of going to his father's, where she was bored to death, for a meal or a log to warm herself by. Lord, but it was dull! Mother Pepys, insufferably stupid; father Pepys, an old grumbler, and sister Paulina, an idle beast, the kind that took one's things and forgot to return them.

They had a single bedroom in which they both slept. And Samuel a loud breather, his heavy head on her shoulder so that she would have to waken him, oh, ever so tenderly—at first. Then gradually less tenderly—an awakening for her too.

She pushed her chair back as much as to say, "That's that!"

With her eyes suddenly over-bright she began rummaging through her top drawer, every now and then holding up a ribbon, a trinket, a flower, trying new effects, her thoughts reflecting the shades of her humour or her ribbons, sulkily discarding, dreamily smiling.

She crossed again to her table, dabbed on some more rouge where a splash had fallen, wiped her eyes and held up a gorgeous bit of brilliant satin, the colour of ripest apricots. Less dreamy now her smile, more radiant. Samuel had said the last time at Whitehall when they stood together in the gallery: "You are as handsome as any!"

Mm—she must get him back to that mood.

For a time, for too long, he had lost it. Her fault perhaps. Yes, her fault. In her morning jacket and stiff underskirt she hurried down the stairs.

"Mercer, Mercer, is the sauce ready and the pasty in the oven? Keep the door shut and the dog out of sight—all must be to the master's taste this day—naught missing—"

"Pull, Mercer—pull! Tight—tighter— Phew! Let me hold to the bed post! There—that's better! Have you no strength? You're all out of breath! Get the wench to help— Ah, that's it! Now—again—enough!"

The moment had come when human efforts could go no further. Elizabeth Pepys was satisfied—

breathless, too—but not for long. One soon settled down in one's stays and scarce felt even discomfort.

"Not that smock—the sleeve is still to be mended. Fetch me the new one—naught is too good for this day!"

In her sky-coloured bodice that came down long below the hips, her tucker low over her bosom, her kerchief slipping from her sloping shoulders—yes, so—not too much—Samuel would like it if it were accidental;—in her flowing skirt with a matching ribbon in her curls—not so bad, viewed from all sides, not so bad—a fitting figure for the wife of Samuel Pepys Esquire.

He would be coming about now. She spread her skirts and went down the stairs to meet him.

Instead she encountered Will Hewer coming up, an advance messenger with a great package of papers and good news—success from every point of view.

If that slow, stolid, prudent young man could ever be said to bound it was now—a joyous Hewer, full of enthusiasm only slightly checked by the exactness of his details. His words well nigh fell over one another in his eagerness to describe the master's triumph—beginning with the end, and then going back to the beginning.

Everything was important! The name of the tavern he had visited on his way to the House, the half pint of mulled sack he had drunk there, the

dram of brandy he had swallowed in the hall, the details of their waiting in the lobby to the moment when he stood at the bar. And then the end—the King himself—the Duke of York—both complimenting him; men like my Lord Berkeley and my Lord Gerard, men who never knew him before desiring to be better acquainted. Over and over he described the scene, from the lords in their robes to the mace on the desk behind which the master had stood.

"You should see him surrounded by big men and little, all eager to take his hand. The day, madam, will live in history," he cried, striding up and down, picturing himself, the secretary, sharing in the honours. "They call him Cicero!"

"The Roman! I'll warrant Samuel could beat him in a wrangle!"

The greatness of the master's victory had added inches to Will Hewer's height, to his wife's too, now that the occasion warranted. She was the wife of a man of importance, no one could take that from her. It was hers to make the most of.

"I am glad we have the coach and the new livery ordered—green, Will Hewer, with red. If we had known this mayhap we would have had it handsomer; still it is good."

Easy enough to see herself at Samuel's side living up to this new magnificence. Easy, for he would be ever more and more lavish. A vision of velvets

and brocades, of laces and bonnets filled the waiting moments.

"Not one bonnet as has been my custom, Will Hewer, but many. One may wear hoods or hats with plumes—or small ones that hold tight to the head as the foreign fashion is."

On the morrow she would journey to the French shop where she had seen a petticoat trimmed with gold and silver parchment—yes, gold and silver.

"He might have been at his own table, so calm and quiet, continuing ever without hesitation or pause," said Hewer.

"My Lady's chair!" cried Mrs. Pepys with a delighted gurgle. What was the use of wasting time on dull details that would be gone over and over as soon as Samuel came in? Heavens, there would be nothing left untold when once he had eaten and drunk—drunk and eaten!

"His voice so smooth—him so erect," said Hewer.

Any minute he would be there! She danced from the window to the door, radiant, picturing results, driving out dull facts with her grace and her charm. Hewer was but a secretary, but, Lord save him, he was a man too! He found himself wondering whether joy or sadness became her most.

"There will be a black boy to carry the yards of my train," she cried. "My chair will be of gold inside and out, with velvet cushions. And I'll wear

patches in the daytime—if Samuel will let me! And we will leave our coach and walk together under the elms at Gray's Inn where all may look at us. No hiding behind trees to see the fashions, eh, Will?"

Fashions! An unending topic, and Hewer the most patient listener. He didn't in fact know one material from another. Bombazine, taffeta, sarcenet, baleen or buckram were all the same to him, but he could keep up a-nodding and a-smiling—presently smiling less and nodding more as he observed her beginning to flit anxiously in and out between the parlour and the kitchen—wearing herself out, poor lady!

She came back each time with her cheeks more aglow from the heat of the great coals and her appetite less with too much sight of the feast. She had tasted every dish till she felt as though she never wanted to see food again. She was that way, not a strong woman, often worried because she was in pain, and often in pain because she was worried.

If only he would come! It had become a refrain setting even the stolid Hewer on edge.

Every minute the house seemed to get fuller and fuller of the smell of cooking. She opened the window and took a long look out to right and left, up Crutched Friars, down to Barking Lane, and beyond over miles of crooked roofs and black chimneys, even to the river itself.

No sight of him.

The conversation dragged wearily, full of uneasy pauses. She fell to recounting the bill of fare she had made ready; told how she herself had been to a certain filthy fishmonger's, something she did not these days so often as formerly, where one could get the best jowl of salmon, a favourite dish of Samuel's. She had thought of prawns too, all the things he liked; tansy pudding and neat's tongue and a dish of marrow bones to begin with. Samuel was like a child in his tastes. Things were vile or noble, handsome or so deadly foul he couldn't endure to look upon them.

"Food to make him merry, eh? After his long and tedious day!"

Tedious indeed! The master had been at it from eleven o'clock till past three. Hewer did his best to make her understand what that meant.

"I know, I know—but now—now, where is he?"

Gradually the shadow over her face had deepened so that Hewer, in very pity, disappeared into the study.

Presently her voice called him—a most sweet anxious voice.

"It grows late, Will Hewer, and Samuel says London is really dangerous, filled with pick-pockets who do not scruple to knock people down even in Fleet Street and the Strand!"

"Nay—nay, he is detained because every one is seeking him out. He has but stopped to hear the

talk." This time he added almost inaudibly: "I should myself be at the office."

She stood hesitating.

"Shall I go below to welcome him—or wait here? What do you advise?"

Hewer answered irrelevantly, as though he hadn't heard.

"It seems his speech, being so long, many had gone out to dinner and come in again half drunk."

"On this day! The brutes!"

"So the House not being full, the vote is put off."

At once Hewer had to assure her there was no cause for worry. The master was victorious, unquestionably. She listened untiringly to that, veritably a woman in love—anxious one minute for his peace of mind, the next for her own.

"The prawns and cheese we'll keep for supper," said she, vanishing into the kitchen once again for a final taste of the sauce, a most special recipe that Samuel had brought home, of parsley and dry toast beat in a mortar together with vinegar, salt and a little pepper. She had been back and forth for the —well from the feel of her limbs she'd have said for the fiftieth time when now, returning suddenly, she paused and stood looking at Will Hewer who was fumbling with his hat.

Something in his manner made her ask:

"And how long must I be patient?"

"The streets are crowded, madam." Any fool could see he was at his wit's end as to a soothing answer. And then:

"Every one stops him with such eulogies as cannot be expressed." And then, seeing her eyes flashing: "Parliament men do cry him up saying that he has done himself right for his whole life."

There was a camel's back to be broken then just as surely as there were straws and women.

"I can wait. His wife can wait," she blurted out.

Hewer was becoming more and more uncomfortable. "I'll to the office for messages and with these papers—then to meet him. There's to be a conference later."

He started again to the stairs.

"The day will come when I'll not wait," she cried suddenly.

"Madam—"

"Where is he now? You know! Now?—now?—"

"His long fast—"

"He knew there was food here!"

"But to relax his brain—"

Finally there could be no more denial. Poor Hewer! He presented the facts as best he could. The master surrounded by his friends, urged to go with one and the other, overwhelmed with invitations, had finally yielded, against his desires, and gone to the King's House. Oh, he himself was

never one for the theatre and had no idea what play was on—

To the play at the King's House!

Knepp—Knepp smiling—Knepp beckoning—

In vain Hewer protested that she wronged the master. He had gone but to mingle with the crowd and to hear the people joying him.

"All his companions of the Navy are there, Sir William Penn—Sir John Minnis—"

"The Navy indeed!" Bitterly, contemptuously, she hurled it back at him. "The Navy!" To set them ahead of his wife! The doting knights—the swaggering rogues!

Hewer stepped this way and that, back and forward from door to door, trying to stop her with a running fire of expostulation. If some one should hear her!

"Let them! I but quote my husband's words of yesterday," cried she. "All hypocrites—knaves—corrupt! His wife to wait upon the Navy!

"Was it the Navy that had listened to his speech one thousand times?— Oh, well, have it five hundred!" He could have his way as to figures—any number would do, but she'd have hers as to language. Her thoughts now outrunning her tongue, she went on brokenly.

Samuel in all his glory—she that had seen him through days of weariness and doubt;—at six o'clock only a morning since getting out of bed to comfort him!—Sir William indeed!

Was it him, she'd like to know, that had advised him to endure the troubles of the office no longer than it took to clear himself of it?

"Me sacrificing myself, going to see Beck Marshall, whom I loathe, do her bit in 'The Virgin Martyr,' which I have heard many a time before, for the diversion of his mind! Then stopping at the Cock Ale House—me that never takes ale—so that he might have his belly full of it! Him lying next me not one hour quiet, full of dreams of his defence! Me not over strong—"

Will Hewer at the stairs—at the window—at the door. And at last: "He's coming, madam—he's coming!"

The great man's wife straightened, holding herself together lest she scream out the still unspoken thoughts battling in her brain.

She could hear him arriving—familiar noises, voices. Mercer, the boy, Jane, Deb—all welcoming him.

Waiting to rend him with her sarcasm, she stood silent while he, like an overgrown lad, blurted out his compliments, beginning proudly with His Majesty and the Duke—pausing to congratulate her upon her husband, calling her Mrs. Pepys and Madam—teasing her, playing with her. Completely happy in the triumph of the moment he had thrown off his wig with his hat and his great-coat. The Samuel of home.

And then, before even she had the chance to felicitate him, which she meant to do icily, he was saying:

"My Lord Hinchingbroke, madam, remarked that I had a great beauty for wife. Mr. Coleman, madam, a very rogue for women, he that has praised my wife many times before, asked this day for her. I am deadly jealous, madam, as I used to be! And the Duke that said he was glad of my success, I am told did eye the wife of Samuel Pepys mightily at the play, but recently, and pay token to her wondrous beauty."

A flood of memories began tugging at her—all their years together, their struggles together, their privations together, his big successes, her little triumphs—still together. Memories as ever chasing the scorn that had made her full lips into a straight line, quenching the fire of rage in her heart. On his great day it was she that mattered! At this belated hour it was her joy for his victory that he had been looking forward to, the pleasure of his wife's pleasure—his wife! She wanted to believe it— Oh, how she wanted to believe it!

That night in a whisper of repentance and longing she prayed the good Lord to help her to be worthy of so great a man.

CHAPTER IV

THE good and the bad of him. The balance sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other, depending a good deal upon the turn of their fortunes.

Oh, yes, the rungs of the ladder counted. It was certainly pleasant to find oneself pointed out as the wife of him that had made the great speech in Parliament. Pleasant to know that the neighbours were peeping at her from behind their curtains as she stepped into a hackney all glass at the front and sides. Pleasant to know that soon she would have a coach of her own and, meanwhile, to be able to summon a hackney when she would.

She stood considering the best place for an hour's jaunt. Samuel had said there was but little company to be seen at the Mulberry Garden. But Samuel was not always to be trusted. He might have his reasons for advising one place for her and another for himself. By his pronouncement Mulberry Garden was a silly place, and the old Spring Garden most agreeable. There one could hear the birds singing in the hedges and stroll about among lovely rose bushes. Yes, she had been there and found it fragrant, but dull. Of course there was always the Park where one might drive around the

Ring, and around again and see plenty of trees and fashion besides. But if one wanted real excitement the choice lay between Covent Garden and the Exchange.

She would have quiet later when she would be going to visit with Lady Sandwich who had begged that she step in, as a great favour on that particular afternoon, because of her French. A new maid just over from France to be engaged and no one to interpret the words of her. Mrs. Pepys, the scholar, in demand!

How different from the old days when she had been bidden—"At such an hour my Lady would be pleased!"

Lud, how frightened she was the first time the summons came! Samuel looking at her without turning his eyes because he was standing in front of the mirror; her gown, the black very stiff silk with black guimp lace too skimp of ruffles for the prevailing style—she remembered every line of it. He declaring finally it was ample for the occasion—ample. Perhaps he thought so. Certainly the big-eyed, round-cheeked glowing child who was his wife might have looked well in anything. But later when she grew less smooth of face and more experienced of men and he still made a practice of condemning the new fashions, especially the expensive ones, and praising extravagantly the old ones, of which she seemed to have everlasting samples, she began to wonder. Wondering roused suspicion that

made her less amiable, more observant, much wiser. Came a time when she'd wait till his belly was full of small beer or such, before she'd dare press her own requirements—a time when she learned to juggle her house accounts so they'd come out right apparently to the last three-penny bit.

One must expect Samuel to spend on himself—it was a necessity of his business to go handsome. But a new velvet suit when to her certain knowledge he had just laid out for a black camlett cloak with gold buttons! It happened that only the day previous he had refused her a satin petticoat.

"There is a new shipment of Farendon," said he, "much fitter for our station."

The while she observed gold lace on his sleeve bands and new buckles on his shoes. She to go in cheap mohair that was Farendon, while he disported himself in velvet!

Having made out that he didn't want to spend overmuch on her she still realised that the better she was dressed the more he seemed to esteem her. Puzzling! At that time she was certain she was the only wife in the world to have such a husband, one who did so joy himself in the company of a brave woman. Another phrase of his flitted through her mind. She couldn't quite remember how he began it, but the end of it was: "A strange slavery that I stand in to beauty that I value nothing near it."

He was that kind. Before marriage it had made

him an exciting servant—she being the beauty; but it was less admirable in a husband with a shifting point of view.

Out of Crutched Friars past Barking Church at the bottom of the Lane, into Fenchurch Street and on to the Exchange, to walk about among the shops on pretence of needing a shoe string or a garter. Along the Strand, shaking and bouncing over the cobblestones, went the hackney. Through its windows one could see Mrs. Pepys looking her prettiest. Long plumes in her hat; skirts of stiff flowered taffeta spread on the seat; over her bodice a velvet coat in the new fashion, short, only to the waist (mightily becoming!) revealing the figure gracefully with pretence of intent to conceal. A matching bag on her arm and a fan hanging at her side. Spick and span from top to toe, with plenty of clothes and a confidential woman of her own, and one hundred and fifty pounds' worth of jewellery locked up in a certain drawer in Samuel's desk! A little furtive look came into her eyes. If some one other than Mercer were listening to her thoughts it might be worth while to pretend it all compensated.

"Gloves or ribbons, madam, most excellent both. Or a choice of fragrant perfumes! Laces here! Smocks and petticoats! Bags and pockets!"

Along the Upper Walk strolled Mrs. Pepys and Mercer at her side. She wished she had eyes at

the back of her head. So much to see, and such crowds jostling back and forth between the shops that lined the walls on either side!

Nobility and gentry, country gentlemen and country yokels, guys in high boots and great coats, fops decked out in the new fashion of vests, dangling canes, eyeing the women, passing discreetly and then glancing over their shoulders for another look.

If only she had dared place a single patch at the corner of her eye to declare herself passionate! Or to wear a ribbon knot—*a venez à moi!* But Samuel had objections—always Samuel.

If he were at her side now there would be all sorts of information pouring into her ears. He would know the name of every passer-by and who lived in each house and the portent of every sign.

Mercer pulled her sleeve to attract attention to one saluting her—John Hales who had painted her portrait! John Hales, big, handsome, young and apparently delighted at the encounter.

Easily he fell into her step, and presently she found that he, too, knew matters of interest.

She listened to gossip of General Monk's wife, a story she had heard a thousand times. But nevertheless her training with Samuel made her a gracious listener to the retelling of it.

They stood before the very shop—"The Sign of the Three Gypsies"—in which she had once served

as sempstress, at one time carrying the general's linen to him after mending it—a strange fascinating tale. Where else in the world but London, even in that advanced age, could a woman rise thus?

"There goes one that is familiar," said he, as Dryden swung past in the crowd. "Great humour he has with this place. He has writ a play, seeing to it that his heroine gives her husband the slip, she pretending to call at her tailor's to try her stays for a new gown.

"Where do ladies go when they tire of their husbands?" he asked presently.

"Turn it the other way round and it will have a more familiar sound," said Mrs. Pepys.

She smiled, knowing quite well that there were times when he had wondered if his demure little sitter had any feelings of her own, any suspicions of her husband.

At a sign Mercer had fallen behind and, for the first time, they were alone. A new and exciting experience! In the studio her husband or her woman had always been with her. How could he know her so? Not in a thousand years. He protested he had painted her but superficially—the outside of her—the glow of her skin—the glory of her eyes—the glint of her hair. The outside of her! With what gusto he described it! Gusto—Samuel's word!

She found herself listening to very much the same kind of delightful converse that she remem-

bered to have had from him when he held that love was eternal.

"Coral lips," whispered Hales. (Samuel had protested they were rubies!) "Eyes like stars," breathed the painter. (They'd been amber to Samuel!) "Quarelets of pearls"—the magic of her face, beauty in every line of her! Nice to hear the same again! She smiled when he complimented her nose, assuring her it had character and was made for the brush of an artist. Her eyelids may have flickered a bit, but not by a word or sign did she betray her Samuel.

She did, however, quote him as she told of the Dutch painter who could make you see drops of dew hanging on the leaves of flowers.

"With paint—think on't! My husband said I'd have to touch it with my finger to be sure my eyes were not deceived. Most wonderful painting that ever he saw in all his life."

John Hales's turn now to sigh and to tell the pretty lady of his ambition to follow in the steps of one Van Dyke, to get at the inside of his sitters—to know her for instance—to fathom her innermost thoughts and feeling. (The painter's chance!) He began declaiming softly, fervently:

> "'Angels are painted fair to look like you;
> There's in you all that we believe of Heaven—'"

The end was familiar from much hearing in early days:

" 'Eternal joy, and everlasting love,' " she whispered, but only for herself.

Time to stop him!

"When a man paints a woman's portrait he has either come at too much of her or not sufficient," she observed demurely.

She was no philosopher but she had acquired like any true loyal wife the maxims that fell from her husband's lips, and she was clever enough, upon occasion, to set them fittingly upon her own lovelier ones.

"Not sufficient," she heard him murmur.

"I hope you aren't so great that you can read to the depths of me," she said, simulating timidity with a little shudder.

"If one might conduct a lady to the Lower Walk," he began.

She brought him with a look to his senses. That he should dare! A thrill went through her!

"There they have excellent curds and cream," he ended gravely.

"So my husband has told me," she answered in kind.

The Lower Walk! By reputation a common place of assignation! Drat the man! That he had dared! And yet—at least he didn't want to lose her society. There one had more of it—too much of it. Many a fair one that her husband so admired had been seen there. If it were not for Samuel—

Samuel again! Samuel for ever standing between her and adventure!

"I must be leaving," she said uneasily. She felt the grip of his fingers on her gloved hand, and under the warmth of his eyes her skin flushed to a deeper glow. His admiration was too ardent, too open—it frightened her.

He drew back and dropped her hand, advancing carefully at her side to the line of hackneys. There he stood bowing formally, almost too formally.

To see the flame flare up once again she paused.

"I must acquaint you with the reason for my departure," she said gently. "I am to interpret the French words for Lady Sandwich."

"I know you speak the tongue," said he.

"The half of me is French," she acknowledged proudly.

"Ah, so that is it!" No mistaking what he meant.

This time he took her hand gently, but firmly, and raised the jessamine-scented glove to his lips. An Englishman who had lived in France!

CHAPTER V

"LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS—to the Lady Sandwich's!"

She gave the order so all might hear. Mercer taking her seat opposite, leaving ample room for the spread of her mistress's wide flowing skirts, reflected her importance.

They rumbled off, and stopped; rumbled again, and stopped.

Elizabeth peered out into the narrow filthy street at the line of vehicles ahead of her—endless. She began to fidget. It would never do to be late.

"London is in an awful state," said she, "awful! And grows worse. And no one knows enough to do anything about it."

"Laa, madam!" That was all one could expect from Mercer.

"They should make the ways wide and remove all steep houses and have no obtrusive shops swinging their signs, virtually into one's face. Nigh on ten minutes we've stopped here! Ah, at last!"

They jogged along again.

"If only you could speak the French tongue;—'tis so little practice I have—"

"Laa, madam, you and the master—" Mrs.

Pepys stopped her with a quick glance. Samuel who tore her ears with his English accent! Samuel's French—Lord, worse than none!

In the noble Square piled high with all the rubbish from the surrounding magnificent mansions, the filthy accumulations of weeks, Elizabeth Pepys felt suddenly small.

A private coach with four well caparisoned horses stood in the paved forecourt of Montagu House. And she in a hackney!

Once within she found that the coach belonged to Lady Hawley who was about to take her leave, only awaiting her daughter's return from the garden where she had been invited to stroll by her hostess.

"It seems but a part of prudence," said Lady Sandwich, "when one is conversing. One drops a thing or two, a word here or there, unconsciously. I have daughters of my own—"

"One cannot be too careful," assented Lady Hawley, "with a young mind. My Lucinda's woman is always close at hand, or me, as to-day."

The little Lady Lucinda! Mrs. Pepys remembered that she had seen an unfinished portrait of her in John Hales's studio—a most pretty maiden.

Her mother nodded at the mention with a conscious smile.

"A great artist," she said, lowering her voice.

"Lord Hawley predicts he will out distance Sir Peter himself. A fine young man by reputation. He too will become a title with time—"

Lady Hawley dropped the name abruptly. The little Lady Lucinda had come in and was standing now with her eyelids shading her eyes, dipping to the ground before the wife of the great Navy chief. Lady Sandwich had presented her thus handsomely.

"A beautiful garden, is it not?" said Lady Hawley.

"Yes, mamma."

"Did you chance to glimpse the swans?" said Lady Sandwich.

"Yes, madam, thank you."

Lady Hawley beamed.

"And the roses?"

"Yes, madam."

"I hope you plucked one."

"Laa, no, madam."

While they were disappearing Elizabeth's eyes wandered to the high panelled walls that surrounded her. In each panel a dim ancestor glowed darkly—the great line of Montagus, down to the present Earl of Sandwich.

Above his lady's head he looked out upon her benignly.

The villain! But no suspicion of what she thought glimmered through her amiable attention to her Ladyship's comments.

"An innocent bud—Lord Hawley's daughter—as was my Jemima," her Ladyship was saying;—"a bud with petals tight folded."

"With marriage she will blossom."

Mrs. Pepys recalled herself;—her Ladyship was right—one had feelings but no knowledge.

"Virgin soil," said Lady Sandwich complacently, "to be planted with her husband's experiences."

A great lady, one of the old-fashioned sort. Elizabeth decided to keep to herself her encounter at the Exchange—best be discreet.

"A sweet romance the little Lucinda's. 'Tis all but consummated," said her Ladyship. "Awaits but the artist's confiding in the parents; the maiden herself has no suspicion."

"But will Lord Hawley consent?"

"'Tis done, my dear," said Lady Sandwich. "For example in the case of John Dryden—naught but a scribbler of verses—"

"A good one—"

"So be it—good, but a commoner bred and born, married to the Lady Howard, daughter of the Earl of Berkshire. Ah, yes, my dear—at first the Earl's family was opposed, but—"

The Lady Sandwich came as near to shrugging as she could, considering the huge velvet puffs that weighted her shoulders.

"In my own family there is Elizabeth Pickering,—blood niece to my husband, daughter of Sir George,—the wife of plain John Creed! Yes, my

dear, 'tis done—'tis done. As the Earl says maidens are so frequent nowadays and men so few and far between—due to the many wars—that we must make concessions in all things, even in the matter of servants."

Her Ladyship with all her position and all her wealth, still prided herself upon her housekeeping, giving it her personal attention.

"A serious matter nowadays, the engaging of a maid," said she; "so much one must come at after one has seen to it that the outside of her is adequate. I have glimpsed the wench," she remarked complacently. "She is below waiting—satisfactory in exterior; many are too red of lip and too full of body."

Unaccountably it seemed, a vision of Deb Willett who was neither, flitted before her mistress's eyes. She had long since decided that her cookmaid's hair was objectionable—more colourful than cheeks or lips.

"This one will be used to questioning," she observed, "for they take no servants in France without a certificate of good behaviour and ability."

"So Mr. Pepys has informed me," answered her Ladyship.

Just like Samuel! Bits of knowledge such as this he was for ever picking up from her that had lived abroad, and then doling them out as his own. The way of husbands the world over. And wives!

Elizabeth had a sense of humour though sometimes justice might be blurred.

Serving maids! In those days an ever fruitful subject between housewives.

Jane, Bess, Sarah—an army of them passed in review. Down the incompetent years they went shrugging, tossing, grumbling, indolent, saucy, wasteful, gossiping.

All of them sluts and slatterns. No dispute as to that; also that one could not overdo as to demands upon their time. The more one asked, the more one got.

That the Lady Sandwich's contribution. Mrs. Pepys nodded. "Cookmaids that can't cook and chambermaids that can't lay a bed or a cloth." She knew!

Then both of them together:

"And such wages!"

Samuel's wife quoted exactly—"Four pounds a year and every now and then a sixpence extra! Such layings out for naught but cleaning!"

"Every one of them overpaid. And ungrateful!" Lady Sandwich lifted her eyes ceilingward.

"Give them the greatest love and kindness, and good clothes besides wages, and what do you get for it?"

"Naught!"

"Naught!"

The room fairly echoed with the word.

"And such liberties as they want—cousins and aunts—sick mothers—visits to make—days in, days out—"

The wench had come in and Elizabeth Pepys was translating—not always literally.

"No sickness in my house," said Lady Sandwich firmly. "The Earl will not endure it. And nothing angers him more than to come upon a wench betimes, in frosty weather, warming in front of the coals. And no falling in love. Below stairs she stops, and of an evening her fingers busy with the making of caps or setting pieces in stockings. Plenty to do. And no going abroad because it's this holiday or that; no junketing about from one end of the town to the other. Some day, if she stops long enough, we may raise her a shilling more a year and even advance her position."

Mrs. Pepys shook her head vigorously. She and Samuel had tried that same once. As she expressed it they had ventured a shift and had made an utter bad chambermaid of a most good-natured and efficient cookmaid.

"The Earl says: 'Leave good enough as it is.'"

Over his lady's head he smiled benevolently while Mrs. Pepys wrestled with French verbs and adverbs. Her accent she could depend upon, it was as much a part of her as her grace and vivacity. The main thing was for it to get to Samuel's ears that she had acquitted herself nobly;—more than half the pleasure of it being in relating the details

to him and seeing his eyes widen and glow with approval of her. This day's doings she would recount to him that evening. A noble day! What matter that when her Ladyship demanded if the wench could mend Elizabeth discoursed on cleaning —*nettoyage* and *nettoyer*. To save her life she couldn't think of the word *to mend!*

The girl's face revealed nothing. Lady Sandwich nodded in pleased ignorance.

"She must play cards," she prompted—"lest I can't sleep. After her day's work it will be frequent recreation for her. And tell her 'tis a hanging offence to take aught not belonging to her—even the matter of a bite of food or a pin. As to the lighting of fires and the cleaning of brasses—Ah, my dear, things were different in our mothers' time. Servants knew their work and their place then. Ah, the old days!"

The business of the servant dismissed, Elizabeth found her eyes wandering again to the Earl. The great Peter Lely had set him up to the life in all his magnificence. Ermine, velvet, ribbons, laces, jewelled chains about his neck, stars and orders on his breast.

The villain!

She wondered if her Ladyship knew that even under her very roof with the daughter of her housekeeper, in this great house—she had had details of

it from Samuel who had pronounced the Earl's conduct with the baggage disgraceful— Samuel!

Aloud she said, "And how is his Lordship?"

"A bit worried," sighed my Lady.

They exchanged a few comments as to husbands and the nature of their worries—business mostly.

It would be interesting to come at what her Ladyship knew—most interesting.

With this ever in mind Mrs. Pepys rattled on from one thing to another. She had been to visit the gipsies out at Lambeth.

Ordinary it was, all that they told her—always the ordinaries of life from their lips—a happy marriage, a husband devoted—

"I know—'Beware,'" laughed her Ladyship.

"Yes, of a dark woman."

"Mine was fair."

"You?"

"Most certainly—their ordinary talk—another woman always!" said Lady Sandwich bravely, even cheerfully.

"Is there—always?" faltered Mrs. Pepys.

"Ah, my dear, our Queen will herself pause sometimes before she goes into her own apartments, lest the King—" Lady Sandwich looked about the room cautiously. "You know—it is no secret, alas. A beautiful character, our Queen's," she broke off abruptly.

"If it were not for her teeth," said Mrs. Pepys. "Mr. John Evelyn remarked—"

"I said character," her Ladyship interrupted. "Men like Mr. Evelyn, even he, consider only the outer form. He is better than most, still a man."

"I am sure he is ever a faithful husband," cried Mrs. Pepys. "If he were not—"

"Mistress John Evelyn is of our sort," said her Ladyship.

"If ever," said Mrs. Pepys suddenly, "you discovered—I mean there are wives—not you—nor me—" She wondered if Lady Sandwich knew perhaps that Samuel— "But suppose—"

Her Ladyship helped her out. "An unfaithful husband? Ah, my dear," said she, "I have my children, and my pride, and a title to uphold." Each time Mrs. Pepys nodded assent.

"You would forgive him?"

"I would make pretence."

"To forgive?"

"Not to know. Better not to know! Our great artists have painted us with our eyes half closed to distinguish us, for all time, from them that know too much."

The great lady lifted her head proudly and folded her hands quietly over her velvet skirt. Erect in her bodice—one could not imagine her ever otherwise—she sat looking into the distance.

Not to know! So that was it!

"I am old fashioned perhaps; husband and wife are one, tied for life. The friends of a woman's husband should be hers. Our dear patient Queen

sets us an example," said her Ladyship. "The Queen is with child at last."

The Queen with child!

Children—grandchildren—a title to carry on!

My Lady and the Queen! All the way back to Seething Lane the hackney rattled the words over and over.

If one had children! Something now never to be.

A reason for upholding one's husband, for excusing his neglect.

"The father of my child!" It gave dignity. One might sacrifice one's self-respect for one's children—for a son perhaps, a son and heir—or for a daughter to wait upon the Queen.

If only it could be got abroad somehow, the suspicion of it at least, that she, Elizabeth Pepys—

In the early days Samuel, still the lover, had said: "You couldn't bear a child to equal you!" Later he had openly vowed he had no desire for a child, her equal or otherwise. Neither had she—she had to do him that justice. Enough for her to know how many women died in childbirth, or went into insane asylums!

Once his Uncle Wight had been mighty inquisitive as to her condition. He had suspected, questioned. Somehow it had rather flattered her, the supposition. Not Samuel—his answer was only to wonder if it might have aught to do with the making of his uncle's will.

Money—money—laying up of money!

And then when Uncle Wight had insisted further Samuel had grown angry. Uncle Wight couldn't understand it, but she could. Mm—the advantage of a wife—to know more of her man than any other, friend or enemy, male or female could possibly know. And the disadvantage—mm—yes.

Near fifteen years married—the good and the bad of him—the inside and the outside. Hers now to make the best out of the best of him.

Not to know! If he had ever been unfaithful—if—she'd ignore the fact, start afresh, interest herself in all the dull scientific subjects that interested him, and even not complain when he kept her awake at night to discuss with her on matters of astronomy or geography, though she knew full well she was used but to aid in fastening them tight in his own memory. God helping her, she vowed to have no such thoughts but endeavour to take all prettily and with apparent pleasure.

If it had been the New Year she could not have been more full of resolutions for the good.

A jolt of the hackney—hereafter she would try to go very clean, in spite of all attendant difficulties—even to going to a hot house, when compelled, for a bath. Another jolt—and she vowed to tell no lies. And not even try to make him jealous. Oh, yes, she had done that in a sort of way—mm—yes. She would make light of her meeting with

Hales and she'd give over as to the question of fashion in the too great revelation of her person. Yes, a small matter that, but it angered Samuel almost as much as her protesting to be a good Catholic. That too she'd keep silent on, and the next time he remarked that for the sake of beauty he was willing to construe everything for the best, she'd not take it unkindly, even though she knew full well it was not she that was minded. Let her but remember whosoever the beauty her day would pass. And she'd try to overlook his indulging himself, celebrating his being cut for the stone for instance, praising the Lord and making merry because he was free of it; and quite neglecting to remember the pain of her tooth that had swollen her cheeks; also the drawing of the same that had cured her. His stone preserved in a case specially made for it —and her tooth—

In faith she'd think of all the nice things he had done; of his many evidences of esteem when she was ill for instance—suffering—as the time when they were journeying and she drank cold beer, and he, summoning the maids and the mistress of the Inn, swore it was a great trial of his true love and passion for her to witness her pain. She'd recall his pleasure when she was admired—not too fulsomely. Also their many hours of merriment and his seeking her for advice—not always taking, but still seeking.

All this she vowed most solemnly to keep in

mind, even according to the letter, calling upon the good Lord as witness to the same.

Not ten minutes later, within her own door, her whole glorious colourful day faded into gloom like a bright sunset submerged by a freak of weather.

She was roused from her dreaming by a confusion of sound. Mercer's voice shrill and indignant. Another voice loud and cockney. The name Knepp —her husband's name.

A strapping country baggage stood balancing a basket of oranges under her arm, and a message for Samuel Peeps Esquire on her crimson painted lips. Mercer was actually turning her away when Mrs. Pepys bore down upon her.

At sight of a possible customer she cried, "Golden h'oranges, 'ere under the leaves. Sixpence h'each, ten for four shillings! H'orange Moll at My Lady's service."

Orange Moll! Mistress of the orange girls at the King's House, with a message for the chief clerk of the Navy!

Hours after when Samuel had declared his wife to be in a fusty humour, the voice of the creature rang in her ears!

Her husband was to bear in mind the coming of Women's Day at the King's House, and he was bid by Mistress Knepp to be there.

By an error the hussy had come to the wrong door. Knepp knew the right one. She had told

her to go to the office. " 'E's a man,' she sez, 'fur 'is h'office.' "

Mrs. Pepys gathered it all in bit by bit, the while hearing praise of the shameless Knepp, and that she was good humoured and had a heart and a way with men.

"Many an one she throws into the pit to us that h'ain't 'ad 'er luck!"

And before the baggage took herself off his wife learned too that her husband was not to forget to come afterwards to the Women's Shift—properly named for little else they wore there!

" 'E knows—and there 'e's to see Betty—Mistress Knepp's new maid. 'Er as 'e calls Belle—Belle Betty. ' 'Tis French!' sez 'e. 'A kiss,' sez 'e, an 'e pays well for 'em."

The Women's Shift—the tiring room where they wait—unready!— Painted women, half naked in the midst of a lifetime of filth and make believe! Cajoling, joking, caressing— Samuel free with them, offering bribes for kisses! Knepp's maid—the vulgar Knepp herself! She had glimpsed her once behind scenes, lying on a pallet in the dark with a lavender bit of gauze—slipping.

Samuel in that dirty hole, rapturous as to the pleasure he takes among the women that act—glutting his eyes of their beauty—an orange girl their go-between—

If there had been children!

Time was when she would have wept. Her eyes

smarted now but not a tear fell. Time was when with quivering lips she would have reproached and petitioned, and he would have explained and repented and vowed.

Not now. Never a word did she breathe of Orange Moll or her message. God had sent her so that the wife of Samuel Pepys might be warned. She believed that as firmly as she believed in Heaven and Hell.

CHAPTER VI

NOT to know. That proved to be good advice.

Women's Day came and went at the theatre, and Samuel paid no heed to it.

Evidently, having observed his wife had something in her gizzard that kept her in a condition of heat, he had made up his mind to guard his conduct. She knew he was wishing she'd come out plainly with whatever it was instead of dropping a word here and another there, but enough to let him know she had heard of his going to plays and carrying people abroad—and mayhap other things. It was the mayhap that made him most uneasy.

"It troubles me," said he at last, "that every small matter is enough, nowadays, to bring a difference between us."

Small matter! With the play of her eyebrows and the curve of her lips she could express much and say nothing.

More and more uncomfortable he became till finally he burst out quite of his own accord: "God helping I vow to spend no more money on plays or wine unless to pleasure us both!"

Followed a period most "expenseful" to his purse but full of kindness and nice words for each other.

Days when she seemed to be all his care, days when they were seen here, there, everywhere together—at the French shop, as she had dreamed, where a hat led to a coat and a coat to a skirt, and a skirt to shoes and shoes to stockings. And at the 'Change where one table cloth led to a dozen of napkins, where china led to glass and glass to wine. Over to Cow Lane, where was a coach to be had at a bargain and horses to haggle over, and reins to select and a coachman to interview.

There was no end to where things led. Samuel finally vowing that all did put him into the greatest condition of outward state that ever he was in or hoped or deserved to be in.

So highly varnished was the coach that Elizabeth stepping towards it could see herself reflected above and below its gilt standards, somewhat broadly to be sure but, all in all, a very satisfactory figure, in shimmery leafy green, wearing a large new hat, with waving plumes to match. And Samuel in blue silk stockings and his best summer suit.

"Not too thin, dear?" In the tone of a solicitous wife.

"Nay, nor can I be too fine!" In the tone of an adoring husband.

Tom, in yellow hose and cocked hat, slammed the door—sprang and missed—sprang again and landed.

"Thank God I have a wife good to look upon," whispered Samuel.

"Be careful of my skirt,—not too close—"

Not too close! Proud words on a proud day!

They turned in at Hyde Park where was a general mustering of the King's Guards.

A sight for children and country jays! Soon over—then one could get into the Ring where scattering mounds of dust filled one's nose and mouth.

Around and around went gilded and ungilded coaches; shabby hackneys and neat ones; prancing horses and quiet ones—all doing the same, facing first one way, then the other. One choked and coughed and wiped one's eyes.

"It makes us appear mighty great in the world," observed Samuel, "you and me in a coach of our own, as pretty as any and observed so by others."

The red ribbons on their horses' manes and tails, the green reins and the green liveries bobbed up and down. Not too much up to permit a glimpse of Mrs. Stewart just ahead with a long plume floating, red as her cheeks, red as her lips.

"Sweet eye, excellent *taille*—the greatest beauty I ever saw in all my life!" exclaimed Samuel rapturously.

"Pay no heed," said his wife to herself. "But yesterday he observed, 'Nothing was anything without Lady Castlemaine.' To-morrow it will be some one else—pay no heed."

"She begins to decay a little," said Samuel presently.

"Who?"

"Castlemaine—her nose is out of joint—"

"You can't be sure—Mr. Evelyn says—"

"Evelyn is a man much above others—a most excellent person when he discourses of trees and vegetables, but, Lord! of women he knows naught."

A cavalcade of horses! More dust, but clearing sufficiently to see his Majesty and the little Stewart greeting each other formally.

"As if one didn't know that every night— The King cannot be blamed— I myself—"

Samuel smiled sympathetically.

Out-riders all in crimson and gold and into view came the Queen and the Queen mother—the dear patient Queen (So different her life!) nodding graciously right and left; simple, not a vestige of artifice on cheeks or lips. So close they passed, the dear ladies, that one could actually see freckles and other things still less lovely.

"Good and modest," said Samuel, "and innocent, which is most pleasing."

His wife nodded but not to that.

"Lady Hawley and the little Lady Lucinda passing!"

"Lady Hawley?"

"I told you t'other day at Lady Sandwich's we

met." She hadn't told him because that was the awful day—it seemed years back. She told him now. A bit of gossip could always get Samuel's attention. The painter Hales and Hawley's daughter!

They passed again.

"The girl is a beauty!" cried Samuel.

"Pretty," said Elizabeth. Samuel did exaggerate so!

The little Lady Lucinda had a tiny white muff and a small cocked hat with a long feather. Her mamma, sitting beside her very erect, bowed graciously. The child looked as though she wanted to make a curtsey but couldn't, being seated. So sweet, so young, so innocent!

"I understand the match is to be perfected," said Mrs. Pepys.

"Idle gossip," said Mr. Pepys. "Hawley looks higher." Samuel having nothing to do with it disapproved.

"Three daughters," she murmured, "and Lady Lucinda in her prime, sixteen and over."

"There he is," said Samuel.

More dust, more clatter of hoofs. John Hales and half a dozen others dashing past; he finely set up in a tight yellow coat, soft velvet hat and high spreading boots—came and disappeared. She hoped he had glimpsed her but wasn't sure—hoped he might pass again.

Meanwhile Samuel: "Fourteen pounds for my

portrait and as much for yours! And more than twenty-five shillings for the frame!"

Suddenly he grew so excited that she had to pull him back into his seat.

The sight of Peg Lowther, Sir William Penn's daughter in a coach finer than any, had set him off.

"For richness surpassing even the King's and my Lady's! And, Lord, nothing else that's corresponding! A ridiculous sight as ever I did see, to live in the condition they do at home, and abroad in that coach!" Samuel waxed more and more indignant. "'Tis all of a-keeping with her having her train held up by her page, a ridiculous piece of pride to be ashamed of, and showing ignorance. She is as ugly as heart can wish," he cried.

There his wife agreed recalling the stupid time she had had at her wedding.

"The poorness and meanness of it all!"

"A sorry dinner," said Samuel, "not anything handsome or clean but some silver plates they borrowed of me!"

He raked up the old story of their having served him a venison pasty that was beef and quite forgot how he and his wife had juggled their own chicken pies, till with a playful smile she jogged his memory.

"Mostly rabbits," said she.

"But not so palpable," said he.

It was nice to hear the effect an ugly woman had upon him to put him in an ill humour. Even pleas-

ant to have him mischievous as to their being so much together, swearing they would be taken for haberdashers since no lady of quality was ever seen with her husband.

A charming couple, any one would have said; she graceful and gracious and loving, eager to help in all ways even to the illusion which he wished to go forth that he had a rich estate left him when his Uncle Robert died at Brampton. It being really but a paltry bit of land.

"But enough," said he presently, "to pleasure us both (delivered with proper emphasis), and to have us seen at the first time of presentation of the Duchess of Newcastle's play."

A great occasion, the prices doubled, the house sold out. Exciting from the first moment of preparation to the moment when the crowds blocked the ways and you had to push through them and were glad you had a sturdy man's arm to cling to; glad you had come early, in time to see the Duchess drive up in a huge black coach adorned with silver when every one had gold—all black and white with white curtains.

Samuel shook his head. His wife was not sure—any one who could gather a crowd like that—

"Makes a fool of her husband, considers his affairs too petty to occupy her full attention."

"Man's point of view," said Elizabeth to her-

self as they wound through the narrow passages to box seats on the first tier.

"An audience of sober, decent people," whispered Samuel, surveying the house. "Evelyn over there with his wife, Carteret with his, the Hawleys—"

She leaned over, peering below. Orange Moll and her shameless gang scampered up and down the aisles breaking jests with the men. Vulgar,—she shouldn't be seen looking—

Lord, there was John Hales! But not dallying—he waved a wench aside and passed on.

Coming up!

She straightened everything from her most under petticoat to her pearl necklace. Opened her fan—shut it—would open it later.

Mercer had said her hair fell from under her wreath most modishly, but that was an hour since. She whispered to Samuel. He nodded, but his new waistcoat, flowered, with silver buttons, was just a shade too snug over the stomach—if he sat quite erect he could keep it from wrinkling—

She pushed her muff down between her knees, laid her fan on the top of it, pulled up her bag, rummaged through it and took out her pocket mirror. Tiny—easier to hold it if one glove was off—

The King!

The house on its feet!— She clutching her bag

tightly attached to her side by a ribbon. Fan, muff, gloves, mirror,—all on the floor. Samuel hot and red, looking at her reproachfully as he did when she had a toothache; she stooping, groping, the mirror lost. Oh, plague, let it lie!

"The Duke of York, the Duchess, no better looking than her mother—Prince Rupert, little Hughes can't be far away. Lady Carnegy, devilishly painted! Buckingham, Lady Essex Howard—"

Samuel knew them all. To live in London and not know would be like living in the country and not riding to hounds.

"And there's the bastard Duke with his mistress —over there—using his comb." Samuel took out his.

A stir went through the house like the rustle of leaves in the forest at Windsor. She had heard the same in humbler quarters, but now with Samuel at her side advancing to a possible knighthood, and the King and the Court in full evidence—

"Look!"

Nell Gwyn was coming in below just as though she was any one, but looking as no one else in a velvet coat cut like a man's, a small cap with ribbons flowing, a lace band tied high around her throat.

Above was the Duchess of Newcastle in ermine and red velvet with an outlandish turban on her head; Lady Castlemaine in a pinner of yellow

satin, adorable; Mrs. Stewart in black lace all over diamonds; the ladies of the Court in cloth and silver—

"And to think that once I kissed her!"

"Eh? What? Who?"

"Nell Gwyn!"

"Oh, long ago when she was a child, on her first appearance,—not now."

Samuel's new manner.

"Plain citizens have no business in the tiring rooms," he went on. "A base company there of painted women, jealous, cursing."

He paused as did many another at sight of Lady Castlemaine in the box next the King, leaning over whispering to him.

"The poor Queen, God grant she may have a child," remarked a woman on one side of Elizabeth.

"Scandalous," said the woman behind her.

Would that make any difference? Elizabeth wondered. But only for a second. Looking from the King to the beautiful shameful one she said: "Faugh!" quite aloud.

"H'sh!"

Some one was shooting rhymes from the stage, telling them they were going to like the play. Not Elizabeth Pepys, prologue or no prologue, she had made up her mind. The Duchess was an old frump, ugly, and didn't know how to wear her clothes.

"Seventeen patches—I counted them," she whis-

pered to Samuel; "and when she laughs her face crumples all in a heap, like a bargain peach."

The curtain had gone up.

Respectful silence and an ever increasing smell of oranges mingled with the heavy scent of jessamine oil. She had grown restless. Strange how one always got a headache at the theatre! Samuel scooped a hole in her orange and one in his own. She settled back and sucked. Most refreshing to the throat.

Their box had filled up, crowded with strangers, two Frenchmen and a lady with them explaining what was being said on the stage. A nuisance! Samuel glaring, and then observing that the lady was pretty he smiled, shrugged, as if to say it didn't matter much, and discovered Sir Charles Sedley sitting at his right.

"All the scribblers are here," Sedley volunteered, "Hobbes, Etherege, Hamilton, Buckingham, Lee—every one with a play up his sleeve. And now the women!"

"Most unseemly," said Samuel.

"Even York's Duchess is writing!"

"The Duchess?"

"Ay, a life of her husband!"

"Lord help him!"

The play went on.

"The rhymes spoil it, break the sense," growled Sir Charles.

Elizabeth was glad to hear that for she couldn't

make head nor tail to it—never could make out things in rhyme—plain everyday prose for her—

A ripple of applause and the tinkle of laughter, —every one turning to look at the Duchess.

Sir Charles *sotto voce* to Samuel: "The Duke can write!"

Obvious his meaning!

Samuel from behind his hand to Sir Charles: "Dryden too! Easy to recognise his touch! A great friend he is to the Duke—money can buy anything nowadays or any one!"

How much Samuel knew!

And now the most exciting moment of any first night! The Duchess was on her feet in her box clutching her velvet draperies, responding to a great round of applause, bowing to His Majesty, bowing to the gallery, bowing to the pit, thanking His Majesty, thanking the management, thanking the actors, expressing herself as full of admiration for every one—so full of admiration was she that Samuel said it interfered with her speech.

That over and the stage cleared, candle snuffers began making their rounds; orange girls started peddling—and worse.—Every one who was any one crowded into the Duchess's box. The Duke stood in the background smiling. Ah, well, if one had a husband who—

"I must offer my congratulations," said Samuel.

Her eyes followed him. She saw John Hales

stopping to speak to him, others too—but Hales! So he would know she was there!

Her muff—her fan,—better have one glove on. Easy now to find her mirror. She was glad she had on her pearl necklace though she had other jewels equally becoming. She thought of that Queen who changed hers even during a levee, as women on the stage change theirs from scene to scene. If one couldn't be a Queen the next best thing—

He had gone opposite to the far end of the house and was standing next the Lady Lucinda—a demure little figure in a blue gown and sweet modest kerchief.

Not a word seemed to pass between them. Lord, he must be bored to death! Poor man! Sixteen and in her prime—pretty with her shock of rebellious curls.

Suddenly, it seemed to her without rhyme or reason, she began to think of Deb, her kitchen wench. Not a line on her face—not a thought in her head.—She fumbled again for her pocket mirror.

Absurd to think of one's cookmaid—here—now—

"Discovered, fair lady!"

It was John Hales slipping into Samuel's seat.

"'Tis good indeed to be able to sit in a theatre

uncovered. No vile allusions to-night," she made haste to add.

"Not a one," said he wearily. "Next week it will be better!"

"A new play?"

"'The Parson's Wedding.'"

(Lewd and amusing—she knew it.)

"A play at which sober, decent people dare not trust themselves, not even masked," said she aloud.

"But you with your husband—"

"Ah, yes—mayhap if one's husband wishes—"

"And your face must be hid—too bad!"

She knew what he meant, his eyes spoke it.

"You'll mark your mask for me," he whispered. "What will the color be? With your skin, your hair—red—a knot of red—"

He looked at her intently. It was only Samuel's returning that detached his eyes and made him relinquish his seat.

A new scene—some one, a woman, was dancing to an accompaniment of groans and hisses.

Sedley grunted and Samuel sniffed.

"She has legs to stop a penny," said Sedley, slipping out of his seat in disgust.

"Whatever does he mean?" whispered Elizabeth.

"Bowlegged," grunted Samuel, "knees turn in—"

The King had gone, Lady Castlemaine had gone, Mrs. Stewart had gone. There remained but the

epilogue to put those left in a good humour and to tell them how much they had liked the play.

"They should have Nell speak it," said Samuel. "She is the only woman ever I did see who could wear man's clothes to perfection;—no bending at the hams, sides or front—as all women do."

His wife sat silent. Considering the yards and yards of material that covered most of them—thanks be to Heaven!—and the number of petticoats over one's shift—but not always, not finally, one could not take them to bed—

"A penny for your thoughts," said Samuel.

"Yes, please." She held out her hand. "I need the penny to have a try with," she whispered.

Under his long velvet cape Samuel closed his big hand over her tiny one, pressing close to her, close as could be, as they picked their way out through the narrow passage into the narrow street where it was already dark and crowded with pushing, cursing, link boys and tall footmen in the usual frenzied hunt for their owners.

"So home and to prayers and to bed," whispered Samuel the lover.

He may have strayed for a time but she had brought him back. His eyes were full of loving mischief and longing—their honeymoon beginning all over again!

CHAPTER VII

COMING in at all hours a few nights later he explained at great length how he had fallen, by merest chance, into a company of very rogues as any in the town, and finding himself there had stayed, just for once, to know the nature of it and their manner of talk and lives.

And so to Foxhall and to supper in an arbour surrounded for many hours by this loose, cursed crowd.

"Lord," said he, "their mad bawdy talk about this and that, and my Lady Bennett and her ladies and dancing naked did make my heart ache!" He shook his head many times over the memory.

An idle roguish book had come his way too—"No wrong to read once for information sake," he observed.

His wife smiled and nodded sweetly.

"It must not stand in my list of books," said he firmly, and with great effect he consigned it to the flames before her very eyes.

It was the manner of his new stuff suit, cut with close knees in the very latest fashion. He could divest himself of either at will, just as he could pray God to keep him from too great expense and, at the same time, praise him for giving him profit

sufficient to invest in plate ample for a whole dinner, from tankards to salts. And books—books overflowing their cases, books piled on the tables, books to be catalogued, books purchased at a bargain, books out of print.

"Samuel's head mightily swollen from over much praise;—everybody joying him."

So presently his wife sitting pensive in her closet. After all the fuss over him in the House and now out of it, it was to be expected. He went about responding with fine, high-sounding speeches, averring, for one thing, that never would he treat his guests as he and his wife had been treated in some houses, quite according to the fashion, like strangers —nothing to eat or drink, not even a cup of tea.

"In my house the old freedom and kindness of England to all our friends," said he. "But the day has come when I must order them and my pleasures to the public gaze and approval."

For the first time Lord Hinchingbroke came to dine. Other lords to meet him, and all the service of silver! Mrs. Pepys, her shoulders drooping a trifle, her colour (natural) fading, hovered over the kitchen, superintending, supervising, getting up betimes to bargain in the markets, sitting up late to see that all things were in order. Samuel appeared in ample time to make suggestions and to watch the man he had hired lay the cloth and fold the napkins into fancy figures of all sorts. A special cook

they had, too, to dress the dishes. Six handsome courses, one dish brought up after another in the latest of fashions, and a most excellent variety of wines. From three in the afternoon till seven at night they feasted and talked and played at cards.

Samuel showed them his books all gilded and newly bound, and his pictures, prints from the French engraver Nanteuil, and panels by Dancre, the four houses of the King—Whitehall, Hampton Court, Greenwich, Windsor. The lords very important, all wearing many orders and ribbons, weighty with arguments and book knowledge, travelled men, experienced counsellors and able financiers, capable of conducting fleets and guiding ships of State, full of noble food and much drink, were lavish in praise of their host and learned in talk of his fine collections.

"Oh, if the good Lord in His mercy would but give them the care and the polishing of the same! And to see that naught was broke!"

It was Elizabeth Pepys communing with herself, standing by with every outward semblance of the proper wifely spirit, smiling bravely, fanning to keep down her now rising colour. Around among Samuel's precious volumes they prowled. As they went on—she went on! She had knowledge of a slightly different sort—but knowledge. All must be dusted and not a leaf must be ruffled or bent or a precious binding rubbed or roughened.

They spoke the names of books—rare books, book sellers to be trusted, new book sellers and old ones, foreign book sellers; Robert Scott, who could find choice editions and out-of-the-way pictures; Harringham of the "Blue Anchor," and another at St. Paul's. They exchanged addresses and recommendations.

Elizabeth was not a cruel woman, but mightily she wished that every book in the kingdom had been roasted in the great fire, and along with them all the sellers of them too!

When it was all over Samuel was at her feet in a mood for rhapsody, declaring that her beauty ravished him as when he had first heard the wind music in the "Virgin Martyr."

"It did rack my soul so that it made me really sick," he cried. "Just as now when in love with my wife!" He vowed their dinner that day was the best entertainment and the fullest of honour and content that ever he had in his life.

"Away with suspicion!" Elizabeth smiled as the quotation, familiar from frequent repetition in many plays, flitted through her mind. She was never one to cherish resentment. In all things these days she followed Samuel's lead. To-night it harked back to the time when he was young, and she was younger, when he delighted to go circumspect—when his highest aim was to be dignified.

"As now," he said, "as now."—And each time she nodded.

After wandering about a bit in reminiscences of the time when he first went to Whitehall and first became known among the courtiers, he began to talk about what he called his nature. He was, she knew, very proud of his nature, especially the correcting of it, and very eloquent as to its difficulties, greater than those of most men, he declared. She never knew why, but she remembered that he was ever most insistent about this. And now, to-day, he impressed upon her that she must not think for a moment that his difficulties had grown less nor his resisting temptation easier. The fascinations of her sex were great as ever, she must give him full credit.

"This very day," said he, "I saw the pretty line-maker's daughter, you know, she that lives at Fenchurch Street. I was tempted to turn back, sorely tempted,—but I would not," he declared—"I would not."

In her chamber he lay at his ease as they talked and talked, she smoothing and combing his hair, he playing the lover pulling her down on his knees, kissing her hands.

"Samuel, I need them if I am to do my work!"

Her beautiful hands, small, smooth, capable. He swore she could do anything with them!

"You shall learn to fold the napkins," he cried.

"I told the man I would give him forty shillings to teach you."

That was Samuel! Forsooth she must ever be learning, if not one thing, another.

Much good talk during these days and always tankards of wine—the best for his guests—Pepys still sticking to his vows to go light. Day after day, hour after hour within sight of his wife, he divided his time between his house and his office; now out on the leads in his shirt sleeves with his flute or his flageolet; now singing at his spinnet; now walking in his yard to see his stock of pigeons beginning with Spring to breed very fast. All most innocent and proper.

"Men of experience spoil their reputations by addicting themselves to drink and other amusements," said he solemnly.

The devoted Hewer shook his head ominously. It was all too peaceful; too good to be true. The master could never go on that way. As well expect the heavens to be always clear, the sun to be always shining.

As for his beloved mistress, she had never been more gracious in her welcome to whomsoever her husband brought to the house. One day it was Hales, the painter (invited she knew because he couldn't help it), come with Moore and Somersett to see their portraits hanging in their places.

Elizabeth sat blushing under a rain of compli-

ments, feeling guilty, now, that aught should be hid of her meeting with the artist at the Exchange, vowing never again to allow herself to feel even the pressure of his hands—vowing—vowing.

Naturally Samuel was pleased to hear praise of his wife, but he would have been more pleased if Hales had not painted him so full of shadows with his chin thrust out, nor had him almost break his neck looking over his shoulder to make the posture for him to work by.

It would have been better, too, if the artist had not kissed her hands in greeting—much better. And if only he would cease protesting that the beauty of his subject had inspired him!

Talbot was a welcome interruption, arriving with the new issue of the *Gazette* under his arm and a splash of mud upon his waistcoat, one of those just ordered by the King for the new style of dress. He set them all off damning the general ill state of things—the enormity of the taxes, the wretched condition of the byways and highways, so blocked with coaches and carts as to make it impossible to arrive anywhere at a stated hour.

For the first time Elizabeth heard of one Christopher Wren—Dr. Wren they called him, who was laying out the city against another fire.

Over-doing of it! They were unanimous as to that, and also as to his status, setting him down as an architect of small account who had come into notice since the fire. They predicted he would be

the ruin of London if he kept on dotting the town with church spires, ornaments and unfit grotesques.

Elizabeth smiled to herself when they held it against him that he was more French than English. Her beloved France!

Samuel alone had a good word for him, praising the instrument he had invented for perspective, bubbling over with information as to its uses.

It was fine to hear him hold his own like that—a man to be proud of! Elizabeth compared him with the others, his zest for life that was often tiresome and his too great curiosity that sent him perpetually gadding, to her discontent, had certainly resulted in a fund of information.

Among the advertisements in the *Gazette* for lost dogs and lost boys, they had come across a paragraph that touched them all.

"Taxes are to be still greater," said one of them dolefully.

"And I see the Navy is to move," said another.

It was Samuel now who brought consolation with a quaint philosophy of his own.

"Gad," said he, "you cannot credit all that is in print! Their account of Navy affairs, for instance, is as false as the hair on our heads."

The hair on their heads!

From Navy and taxes to periwigs. Samuel bristling with pleasure to hear that the Duke of

York had said he would not have known him in his flowing curls! The Duke!

How he gloried in titles! Small perhaps, he was something of a snob—but after all he aimed at the highest, and captured them.

Then she caught the word "forbid."

"Patches and paint and powder," Samuel was saying, "false attributes all of them. I have forbid my wife the use of them."

Forbid! The colour was in her cheeks. Forbid! As when he says: "I'll have my will done without dispute, be the reason what it will." Forbid, indeed!

The painter smiled over at her.

"I swear they do become a woman," he cried.

"On the stage, by candle light," growled Pepys.

"And nearer—Heaven bless them," cried Hales. Their eyes met again.

With his wig set low as now, Samuel's face was rather heavy, over-fleshy, and his eyes too prominent.

How angry it had made him when she said that Hales's portrait of him was good! Never would he rest content till he had ordered another—handsomer—less like him. It would cost money. She wondered what she would have to forego. Lud, it was enough to make any woman snappish!

She recalled her vows and actually summoned a smile.

" 'Romeo and Juliet,' " Samuel was saying. "The

worst play that ever I did see in my life! And not helped by the introduction of a new character —Count Paris's wife. A lovesick twain, mawkish, and a family brawl."

She remembered it. She was rather in the mood to think it sweet, though she had forgotten who wrote it until he said:

"'Tis by him that wrote 'Twelfth Night.'"

To be sure! A silly play that, if ever was!

"And his other about a black man—worse still," observed Talbot.

"A highborn lady in the arms of a Moor!"

"I thought it a mighty good play," said Samuel, "till I read 'The Adventures of Five Hours'—a play of the greatest plot and vigour—the best play I ever read in my life, by the forgotten Colonel Tuke. After that these others seem a mean thing."

Again she observed how much Samuel knew. Sometimes perhaps a bit garrulous to be sure, still it was wonderful the way he gathered up ideas and gave them out as his own!

"We have no stomach for such nowadays—we know too much."

"This Shakespeare has had his day! Dryden is the man of the future."

Not for her; she had just seen his "Mock Astrologer" and had told Samuel—

He was quoting her now, using her very words.

"A smutty play," said he authoritatively, "taken from 'L'Illustre Bassa.'"

He showed the four volumes neatly gilt. Only he forgot to credit the information to his wife! She wondered if all husbands—

She heard her name, but not in that connection. He was telling how he had permitted her once on a great occasion to go behind scenes and visit the tiring room.

Using her to show how at home he was in the theatre, telling how he had walked all up and down the House above and then below into the scene room, and there sat down and had fruit.

"Talking loud and imitating the King in the pleasure he takes among the women that act," she said to herself.

Presently he was boasting of having coached Knepp, reading her the questions while she answered him through all her part of "Flora's Vagaries." He forgot to tell his friends that he had abjured her forever! Mm—one style of converse for her, another for them!

"A very merry, dancing, drinking, laughing, quaffing, and unthinking time!" Samuel quoted merrily.

Hewer ever hovering in the background, one eye on the mistress one on the master, wondered if the mistress had remarked the master's eye too frequently on the new maid from Deptford, Deb Willett.

Had she?

The girl was pretty—mm—yes—and she did

have a voice and was quick to turn a tune. If he— Now—now—

Again and again she pulled herself up. Actresses, orange hussies, servants— Faugh! Every one praised him for his kindness to the lowly and there was no doubt he loved mightily to instruct. One had to acknowledge that even though it gave one a jolt, as the other day, to come across him holding forth to this same Deb in the kitchen—but Mercer was by.

"I have a mind to have her learn to sing," said he.

It was as important as the mending of his trousers. She did that too. He had sent for her to his closet—but had left the door open. Even then as the girl was stitching he had introduced a song—and his wife had put him in mind of its being a fast day for the King's death, and not one for song. But all days were not fast days.

For a week he had been still more important than usual, declaring his head full of care about the business propounded to him by Lord Sandwich of matching his daughter Lady Jemimah with Sir Philip Carteret.

Samuel a confidant of the high and mighty! Samuel a go-between, Samuel feeling his oats more than ever, strutting even when he was sitting, boasting even when he was silent. Oh, his wife knew the manner! It riled her beyond words.

"My Lord intends to give five thousand pounds with her. Ay, and she wants a husband mightily."

He hummed between his teeth. That riled her too, and he smelled of tobacco.

She was frankly bored, not caring a tuppence whether they matched or no. She had never liked Philip Carteret, an awkward, over-modest fool to her way of thinking. Even Samuel acknowledged that he was the most awkward man he had ever met with regard to women and love.

Women and love! Samuel showed that he was beginning to wonder if he hadn't been perhaps too strenuous in the making of his vows. His wife was still in something of a toss struggling to live up to hers, the afternoon he ushered in young Carteret and his friends. A rollicking, good-humoured, drinking crowd, full of all the recent gossip of town and Court, beginning with the tale of Mistress Jennings, maid of honour to the Duchess of York, she that had tried to disguise herself like an orange wench and had had the misfortune to fall down. Betrayed by her fine shoes—not to speak of something higher up. Revelations! Broad jests as to what more she had uncovered. Great hilarity! Broken sentences floating to the ears of Mrs. Pepys as she went in and out, more out this day than in, doing her duty, nevertheless, as to the proper refreshments, sending in Deb to serve wine,—enough and too much.

"She all of a heat, red as a turkey cock! And her shift!— To Mistress Jennings!"

"Fill up! Fill up! Again! Fuller!"

They exchanged glasses in the French manner,— "bowing to him that drank to you and to him whose lady's health is drunk, and then back again to the person you drank to. Then drinking another half a cup which was then filled up again and presented to him or her to whose health you drank."

They drank to the health of Pepys the speech maker; to the King, to the King's mistresses.

"Castlemaine!"

"Many's the time I've glutted my eyes of her!"

"To the beautiful Stewart—a full glass!"

"Stewart that graces the position to which it has pleased God and her virtues to raise her," observed Pepys solemnly.

Becoming more and more weary Elizabeth vanished up the stairs on pretended business. Hewer prayed she might stay there. The master was growing free—too free—reckless in talk and manner, boasting of his knowledge and how he had acquired it, talking so loud that his wife in her closet could hear every word. It was the same old tune, just now keyed a note too high. Hewer tried to stop him. As well try to stop the plague or the great fire! The simple Hewer invoked the aid of the Lord as he had then.

Full of reminiscences Pepys went back to the time

when with the King at Gravesend he had kissed a handsome wench, shouting out it was because she was the first he had seen for a great while! Then there was a widow, and he had a kiss or two of her—

"Drink a health!"

"Another round!"

"Fill up! Fill up! One glass more!"

Talk of Mrs. Lane's white thigh and leg. Of Lady Chesterfield's short fat one in green stockings. No leg worth anything without green stockings!

"The King maintains no woman has such handsome legs as Mrs. Stewart."

"To Mrs. Stewart!"

"Fill up!"

"Another round in the French manner!"

And so on—and so on.

Gossip of the Court;—a tale of one of the maids that had dropped a child—and how many reputations Charles Sedley had unlaced.

Samuel in his element telling again about Madam Bennett and her naked ladies— Oh, but quite differently! So vivid his description you might think he had taken part in their dance himself.

At an inauspicious moment the swish of a skirt sounded in his ears, the skirt of Deb Willett. He caught sight of her hovering about in the dining-room, and cried out to her familiarly. She, the

hussy, approached near enough for him to lean over and pinch her cheek. He pulled her over to him and began caressing her, calling her a good wench.

"Good and not too forward, and a pretty one, eh?" Undeniably pretty she was in her snowy cap and apron.

"I'll brook none other if I can help it. A toast to the lot of them!"

She dropped a little curtsey.

Hewer in an agony of unrest hovered near the mistress's closet. He contrived to get between the master and the girl.

"Fill up! Fill up!"

The words echoed and re-echoed. Samuel's voice always above all the others, boasting of his affairs, relating his adventures, swearing knowledge was as necessary as the sword at his side; vowing that he didn't care three pinches of snuff who heard him!

"To Bartholomew Fair, which gave me occasion to kiss a mighty *belle fille;* she was exceeding simple and *fort belle,*" he cried. Then scarce able to stand on his feet he burst into verse:

"A mighty pain to love it is—
And 'tis a pain that pain to miss—"

By this time Carteret had lost his timidity and drooling over his goblet he sighed out:

"But of all pain the greatest pain
It is to love but love in vain!"

"Have a heart, man!"

"Be bold!"

"*De l'audace!*"

"He's in love!"

"Happy man!"

"Fill up! Fill up!—one glass more!"

"A husband, St. Catharine,
A good one, St. Catharine,
But arn-a-one better than
Narn-a-one, St. Catharine!"

In her closet Mrs. Pepys tapped her foot to the tune. The song died. It was time for her to go in. They would be beyond noticing her. She knew that from past experience. Samuel would be showing off. She knew that too. He often did that same after he had emptied his glass more than was good for him.

"To my lady!" blubbered Carteret.

"Man, you're in love—in love!"

Carteret was weeping into his glass.

"He's in love and can't give it evidence," Pepys insisted, supporting himself against the table.

"You begin gently, very gently, speak of the many women you've known—thus to show you're not a novice. You view her with the eye of a connoisseur. But you protest you're in love. Now for the first time—the last time is always the first—'tis an enigma in the game of love. All others recede into nothingness, mere memories, episodes—forgotten episodes—the last is ever the best!"

He appealed to them all, right and left.

"Whatever her desire, may she have it!"

"And may her desire be mine!"

"To the lady of my heart!"

"Bravo! Bravo!"

Their host's eyes were bulging above his over-red cheeks.

"Now, you," he cried to Carteret. "Now,—your lady sits on 't'other side the board. Her eyes blue, brown or grey, it makes no difference—are half asleep. Every woman is asleep till some man wakes her! 'Tis the soul behind that's to awaken and set the fires leaping! You take your glass in your hand, so,—you begin with slow movement, with a general word, 'To the ladies—the world of ladies—God bless them!' And now her hand lies there—here wench, come hither—"

The devil take the moment! Will Hewer was powerless.

Deb was at the master's side—Deb glowing, over-willing, over-rosy, soft, leaning to him in the act of handing fresh goblets.

"Put 'em down," cried the master. "Here,—here,—closer,—your hand, so—a dear little hand—and above it a sweet face—sweet enough to tempt a man—"

Perilously close the smiling face—perilously near the yielding body—her hand in his—his arm about to creep around her waist—

At that moment Hewer felt the mistress coming

in! Trying to get between her and the master only made the matter worse. Poor Hewer!

"Get along, my pretty—get along—more wine—more wine!" cried Samuel, waving his arms.

"Fill up! Fill up!"

In the French manner—bowing to him that drank to you and to him whose lady's health was drunk, and then to the person you drank to. Then drinking another half a cup which was then filled up again and presented to him or her to whose health you drank!

When Samuel finally lurched up the stairs he found his wife with her hair hanging in a disordered mass, her eyes red with weeping, waiting in the dark of her closet to charge him with every sin known to man. Revelations followed—revelations to fit the occasion, so unfit that Hewer went about closing doors and windows, slamming them when he could find excuse.

A bad storm this—the worst of many!

Any one might have sworn they would never come together again—any one but Hewer.

On such occasions it was his custom to hover below stairs watching for an opportune moment to intervene. They might even send for him as they had so many times.

His poor mistress—she'd have an awful headache!

Her voice again— "Liar—without conscience—you that I married in all innocence!—"

If the master would only keep silent!

His words were somewhat blurred but she caught enough to know that he was not apologising. Whatever he had done he was not ashamed of it—not he—not then. He was swaggering, ugly, insulting. What had she brought him but a comely person? Actually attacking her! His head in that kind of taking!

Her own was in something of a whirl, and she didn't stand any too silent. She stamped and raged and swore and threatened till, at last, he was roused to such an extent that he was no longer indistinct.

Higher and higher their words, louder and louder their voices:

"Beggar!"

"Pricklouse!"

This time she had found her tongue to some effect, for it brought from him a word worse than any. The battle could go no higher.

He stormed down the stairs and out of the house, banging the doors, vowing he'd stay at his office all night, sending her to the devil!

To the devil! After him she flew, bareheaded, rejoicing aloud that it would vex him to the guts to have his affairs bruited to the public eye!

Not a whit surprised or even disconcerted she ran into Will Hewer in the parlour, almost fell over him, as he stood barring her way with familiar, time-honoured arguments.

Her position—her husband's; her beauty—her

fascination; the neighbours! The master was wrong and he knew it. Give him time.

Time! He had shamed her with a slut of a servant—a jade—a baggage—she'd show him!

Poor Will Hewer!— He was, it seemed, as powerless as a lamb in a den of wolves. He sighed, and stood speechless but with his eyes fixed in evident disapproval on her hair,—her dishevelled, beautiful midnight hair.

Half way to the stairs she was when he caught her up with this: "I fear, madam—a lock has fallen—"

It brought her back into the room and swiftly over to the looking glass. She stood there trying with shaking fingers to make her hair presentable. Difficult—it was hanging about her ears in damp strands;—that and her swollen eyelids—red—

Hewer reached for his pipe, and as he filled it, smiled quietly. His pipe was always a comfort. Also his moment had counted—only a moment, but at least she was not quite regardless of the neighbours. A good sign.

Her mouth full of hairpins she stood jerking at her bodice, pulling her kerchief into place, gulping down her tears.

There were various roads to reconciliation—Hewer knew them all; he could travel miles with a single whiff of his pipe—he who had served for years.

"Give him time," he repeated gently. "He'll be

sore put to it to present you with something special! Ah, the new moiré gown but lately denied you!"

She shook her head but not so violently—more as though she were grieved.

"No less than that—no less—though it will cost much money!"

Poor Hewer, he was no lady's man; however he did his best, going on and on, presenting her with things from her special tailor (even remembering his name, Unthanke);—a gown new laced—all lace. No, not enough—she'd have that anyway. He could see that and more from the shrug of her shoulders. A diamond pendant, mayhap! Something she'd had in mind a long time.—

The mistress was wiping the tears from her eyes. Poor dear lady! Hewer laid down his pipe at last and tiptoed out to the kitchen.

He was ever on both sides the fence—now on her side, now on his chief's—torn between the two people he loved most in the world.

She knew what he had gone for. Indeed she knew.

"Calves' head boiled and dumplings," he announced presently. "A favorite dish of the master's—one he likes mightily."

As he refilled his pipe she vanished, but up the stairs, not down.

When Hewer was leaving that night she could hear Samuel in the hall talking obviously for her

benefit, telling how he had seen the King and the Duke of York—in fact, all the court—drunk, kissing one another. "And in such a maudlin pickle as never people were!" Trying to find excuses for himself!

From that he went to blaming himself—without reserve—above all for having broached his tierce of claret. Incomparable good, but it had blurred his vision so that he hadn't known, hadn't seen. He complained very distinctly, always to Hewer, but directly outside her closet door, of the strength of his wine, and the weakness of his poor head and his poor eyes, that every one had looked alike to them. A skirt was a skirt!

Then very loud: "So to supper and to bed without one word to each other—an excellent supper though silent," he ended regretfully.

She couldn't hear Will Hewer's answer but she knew it was something in her favour—something that would tend to bring them together and make their inevitable reconciliation easier.

"Fill up! Fill up! Again! Fuller!"

All that night the words echoed in her ears.

"So here's to you! To you both! In the French manner! One glass more!"

Samuel in his room next hers was muttering of fires and the falling down of houses. She called out and he awoke moaning. Then as the night wore on, he grew more unquiet, more restless—

starting up at last with a loud groan, and rushing breathless into her room to assure himself she was alive and whole. He had dreamed that horses were trampling her, crushing her bones—he was running to her rescue—making an awful noise about it—arriving in a dripping perspiration.

Later again—but this time she wasn't awakened because she hadn't gone to sleep—he began crying aloud in a terrible night-mare. She had to rise out of her bed and go to him.

He awoke weeping.

He had dreamed his wife was dead.

In the office next day Hewer watched furtively.

"Very merry and well pleased with my wife," said the master pompously. "And so to walk with her in the garden, and then out by coach to my Lady Sandwich's where I left her."

"So put out had he been that he durst not read prayers for fear of being perceived by the servants in what case he was."

The mistress sat musing till presently catching Mercer's pitying eye, she observed aloud:

"Red Rhenish wine goes to the head and makes one light as a grasshopper. Too much of it drunk yesterday and after so long abstaining accounts for all."

PART II

CHAPTER VIII

"POOR wretch!" Samuel was right this time. Her whole head was aching and her ruffles were most odiously shaped and Unthanke, to whom she had made bitter complaint, offered no satisfaction. Also Leeson, the surgeon, had advised having a tooth out.

"Best have it done while I'm off on my jaunt," said Samuel, turning over his maps.

He was not unsympathetic, merely a tooth was not serious, and where his wife was concerned, like many a better man, he was a philosopher. If one had to have a surgeon why not have him while her husband was absent? As for her, she was only too glad to wait, it was better than to have him fussing about, suggesting the wrong thing, showing plainly that he didn't want to be there, looking at her none too admiringly when her face would swell and her eyes show puffiness, shuddering if she had to have ever so small an operation.

She had a husband who couldn't bear trouble or the sight of pain—it made him impatient. Yet he could be most solicitous— As usual she found herself looking on two sides of him at once. That was her trouble—too many angles.

She sat now before her embroidery frame making feint to work, so wrapped in troublesome thoughts that she cared naught about her worsted leaves and flowers. Too often these days there were tears in her eyes and a lump in her throat.

Mercer, standing at a table close by, ran her hand back and forth along the rim. Presently she turned it over—dark—and made pretence to look for something to wipe it off with. Mercer, who had served both of them these many years—herself as a confidante and companion, the master as a passing fancy. Oh, yes, she knew—a passing fancy only. She might have been jealous of her once but not now, she was too fat and old—near thirty. Samuel liked them young. She could trust Mercer.

As though out of a clear sky, of which there had been none in days, she said suddenly:

"I don't like her and never shall!"

"Who?" Mercer was apparently all innocence.

"Deb, Deb Willett, she's a forward minx! I felt I wanted her gone as soon as ever she came. I've no faith in her. It's a fool woman that takes into her house a maid so pretty."

Mercer pursed her lips. She had ever an annoying way of sitting silent until she was actually asked for an opinion. The way of a menial in the presence of her betters.

"The girl's pretty—"

Silence—

"Eh?"

Mercer contented herself with a slight deprecatory movement of her square shoulders.

"She's rounded, all curves under her petticoats."

Silence.

"Yours is the taste of a woman—she has points for a man."

Silence.

"Drat the wench!" Not quite clear as to which one.

Mercer lowered her lashes and showed a tendency to smirk. It was evident she knew something. If only one could arrive at how much and by clever manœuvring induce her to reveal more and then somehow get rid of the slut from Deptford!

"Forward minx I call her—forward and pushing and careless in her work." A long pause during which she plied her worsted nervously. "Nell was a good maid, do you know where she's to be found?"

"Nell?"

"Nell, I said—Nell—a strong wench, sensible and plain."

"But this one—"

"This one?"

At last Mercer volunteered something: "She's learning to sing the master's new song."

"Is she? You can sing it fair enough, or me for the matter of that. That's naught—he's music mad however he gets it."

"She's pretty," said Mercer.

"Who said so?"

"Why, I thought—madam—"

"In a heavy way."

"Heavy?"

"You're all echoes to-day! The girl's going because she's careless in her work."

"If he'll consent."

"He?"

"The master."

"Because of her music?— She goes."

If that had been all—Mercer's suggestive manner, her own suspicions, in spite of Samuel's protestations that she was making an issue of nothing—doubtless things would have gone on shaping themselves as heretofore; she in tears hurling reproaches, he in a rage hurling back curses, both refusing to give in. Then over a good dinner he thinking better of it, she more than willing to make up, both of them eager to compromise;—the girl to remain because good cooks were so hard to get; he swearing he had come to loathe her because she interfered with his wife's peace of mind, and so on and so on.

A broad ugly face was poked in at the door; Tom, the boy, announcing one below with things for the madam.

"To be sure," said Mercer, "the vizards were ordered for to-day, and new laces for your stays,

and one of the new skirts for you to have a try with."

An exciting half hour ahead! The kitchen wench and embroidery frame were shunted to one side as an elderly woman with a couple of large baskets, balanced on a pole, pushed her way through the door.

Mrs. Pepys knew her quite well, a civil person with a good shop at the 'Change. Many and many a time she had paused and looked in at Mistress Harper's window.

She was the sort that complained and complained. She had grievances by the score, but who had not in those days when a working woman thought herself as good as the next? She was kept waiting on steps till her limbs ached. People haggled over prices, tearing her gloves with trying them on; and wore out her goods with turning them back and forth, in and out, without so much as a thank you.

Profits?— None in her trade, a hard trade hers.

"All trades are hard, it was easier when women knew less."

Mrs. Pepys sighed behind the black mask she had ordered—exchanged it for a pink one—returned to the black, remembered she was to mark it with a bit of red—remembered—but only half-heartedly.

She stood before her mirror, asking Mercer for advice. She had good taste, Mercer had.

"Mostly they wears black," said Mrs. Harper,

"but many 'as several. A pink, a black, an' this 'ere's a green."

"Lud, I can't afford but one," declared Mrs. Pepys. "Don't tempt me, one's enough!"

The woman grunted out a protest as she sat on the floor looking up at her. Pretty, petted wife of a rich man, a good customer the Navy man—he came often to her shop to buy things for his wife.

"Indeed times are hard," said Mrs. Pepys, "what with the war and the taxes and the high prices of food and clothes—and now another change in the fashion! Will there ever be a day when one may keep on with the same? Our lovely graceful trains to go in favour of skirts above the ankles! Think of a mode that would expose one's feet, and the expense—once cut, cut for all time!"

She dropped her own trailing skirt—as it turned one could see it was deeply bordered with black from the dirt of many floors—and over her head she slipped, with grunts and gurgles, one of the newest patterns.

"Lud! Fearful—downright immodest! And most awkward— Whatever shall I do with my feet?"

She looked down upon her well-turned ankles, revealed when she twisted back and forth upon her square-toed satin slippers,—looked and cried:

"Never would Samuel permit it—never! Here, take it off! I'd as soon go forth in my most under petticoat!"

Her kerchief had become disarranged— She pushed it over where it belonged so that her bust was well exposed above the line of her low cut bodice.

The woman went on delving down into her baskets, bringing out trinkets, beads, scarfs, shawls, hoods—and more useful things still.

"Teeth, a beautiful set for my Lady Sandwich, an' bolsters for the 'ips of Lady Penn. Your Ladyship 'as no need of 'em, you've a beautiful figger without. I've 'eard your Ladyship's form much admired by several." She held up a hood— "'Ave a try with it, my Lady."

Her mirror gave back sloping shoulders, a rounded waist, small in inches; glowing eyes under the hood.

"I'll warrant Mr. Peeps would 'ave you take it!" said the woman, nodding approval. "'E'd like it— 'e would!"

His wife was thinking it was nice to have a discerning husband, one whose appreciation was worth while, one for whom you wanted to put your best side forward; a man who knew beauty and who knew about clothes too, knew if they were becoming; a man who could be interested in the lacing of your gown, in the matching of your ribbons—who could take you in at a glance as you wanted him to take you. Nice—

And then the bomb burst!

Mrs. Harper on the floor in the midst of her

goods, picking up, sorting, packing, paused to ask how her Ladyship's lace had worn.

"Lace?"

Mrs. Pepys was taken unawares. Lace? She recalled no lace, she had almost confessed it when she recovered her senses.

"Lace?—Oh, lace! To be sure!"

She stood now listening with all her ears, her hand, it is true, pressed to her heart to still its sudden thumping, listening to the shop-keeper complimenting her upon owning it.

"Not a piece like it to be 'ad nowheres, none so fine."

"Beautiful!" said Mrs. Pepys, and again, "Beautiful!" She was even able to force a smile.

"Now 'ere's a bit not to be compared though it be off the same pattern."

"The time runs on faster than one thinks!" said Elizabeth slowly. "It must be two months or more."

"More, my Lady—nigh on a year, ay, all of that."

Mrs. Pepys sat silent, evidently dreaming as the woman gabbled on and on about lace, masks, and the fashion in hoods and petticoats.

"Faith, your striped one—"

Mercer stood rigid, not even evincing an inclination to smirk, her eyes on the mistress's face, conviction settling there with each new moment.

The shopkeeper, glad of an audience, went on and on.

"Blessed be God for Mr. Peeps, a good customer an' a good pay. Quick in 'is taste—knows what 'e wants. 'A striped petticoat,' says 'e, 'of the new French silk'—an 'andsome petticoat, so gay! An' beads to match the red stripe. I'm glad you 'ave it an' the lace! Oh, 'tis a merry world sometimes! The 'ood in your 'and was returned this very day! A sad world 'twas then. Take the 'ood, my Lady, it becomes you right well."

So the bomb had burst! Wrapped up in a bit of lace, aimed straight at her heart in the folds of a striped petticoat—red and green—a striped petticoat worn by Deb, the baggage from Deptford—Deb, the raw servant with the red hands and the red cheeks and the tossing curly head!

She was determined now to be rid of her forever, but she wanted first more proof—proof that she and Samuel—after all the lace had not been for her—the expensive lace—for that was bought a year past. Mm—his procession of women! And her cookmaid, the latest! But if there were still more to it—if—God knows what she feared!

She could settle down to nothing. If she was in her closet she felt she should be in the kitchen—anywhere but where she was. If she heard voices she was certain they spoke of her and to her dis-

credit. When she caught sight of the wench she had murder in her heart! She, the latest!

Samuel must have underestimated the strength of the gathering storm. It is highly probable that he didn't recognise that a storm threatened, the usual grumbling warnings being absent. His wife's attitude indicated a certain fustiness, as he was wont to call it, a certain ill humour or high stomach, but he believed that would pass as before. He took great credit to himself for being patient and silent.

Whether her information came coarsely from the full lips of Orange Moll, or unwittingly from between the toothless gums of Mistress Harper, or carelessly from the reckless Samuel himself—to the humble mind of Elizabeth Pepys it was all of divine source. God was plainly on her side!

Ardent in her prayers, eager to assist, she took to listening at key-holes, pausing a minute with her hand on a door knob, standing at the head of the stairs and then appearing suddenly.

So she caught a whispered word, a covert smile, a significant glance that she knew was not intended for her. One night she overheard him say to Deb something in complaint of his eyes.

"They see fair well when there's aught to see," she muttered to herself bitterly.

She strained to hear. He discoursed as ever of

music, his new song still to be learned. Music the bond!

The girl's hair, lit by the flame of the fire, glowed vivid, crinkly, escaping from under her cap, all of an end. He hated his wife's to go untidy, but this raw country jade— Mrs. Pepys, careful housekeeper, crossed the room, poked down the coals and vanished, leaving Mercer on guard—Mercer respectfully silent, but alert.

In her closet as she paced up and down, she could hear their voices, the girl's high—too high. "Young," Samuel called it. Oh, how she hated the word!

Over and over he had taken occasion to assure her that the girl was but a child, an ignorant country fool, with naught to attract a man in his sober senses. He was most plausible, using her own very words to convince her, giving voice to what she most desired to believe.

> "It is decreed—nor shall thy Fate, O Rome,
> Resist my vow, though hills were set on hills!"

Mightily cried up this new song had been, even more so than his other, "Beauty Retire."

She closed the door, trying to shut out the sound. Impossible! When one's man was making a tune his wife must suffer and stay silent. He was preparing it for the actor Harris who had promised to sing it. John Kingston, the organist, had commended it. And Mr. Hill had liked it but had ven-

tured a suggestion. Samuel pretended he was anxious for criticism—wherein he could fool Mr. Hill and himself but not his wife! Criticise him and he was like an aggrieved baby.

" 'Though 'ills—w-a-a-s—' "

The girl!—Samuel stopping her—telling her to pronounce the H—Mercer showing her how. Samuel banging on the spinnet keeping time and the girl shouting again. Better now—better!

She could picture him with a smile of approbation on his lips. The girl had a voice—

Faith, so long as she was singing!—She stopped. Elizabeth crept out of her closet.

"Sing it thus—" Samuel's voice. "Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta—"

She crept back.

Still later that night he sat in his chamber in gown and slippers scribbling, bending over his desk, red of face—too red—breathing loud through thick lips—scribbling—scribbling.

On and on scratched his pen.

His wife glanced through the open door to where he sat. He looked, with his short hair as in early days, like a mischievous boy. It made her think of the time when he was so proud of having a watch that he'd carry it in his hands and glance at it a hundred times to see the hour.

A boy—chuckling. Yes, distinctly she had heard him chuckle.

Could it be over Navy reports?

She flitted in on pretence of finding something mislaid, and caught a look in his eyes when he lifted them. Once she had trembled and called their expression dangerous and fled from it with burning cheeks. He after her.

Navy reports?— Mm—

In those days he used to beg for her presence, leaning over her, dropping his pen to press her hand —lover-like and more. Days when he used to talk about his journal, break to her all his thoughts and then read her a bit here and a bit there, consult her as to its contents, compliment her when she suggested items he hadn't thought of.

She took occasion to go near enough to him to help herself to a glance over his shoulder.

Curves and half curves, double lines and dashes, dots and hooks!

As she approached he moved one hand over his writing.

In her brain she heard a clatter as of books! Her mind sprang back to the day when Mercer, coming down the stairs, had dropped an armful of them—Samuel's books filled with loose papers!— Mercer who had moved them safely a hundred times at his order back and forth— From his closet, from his chamber; to his chamber, to his closet; from the parlour, in and out, helping to place them in the presses, helping to catalogue

them;—sure-handed, sure-footed Mercer.—Mercer who had never dropped or broken anything!

She recalled a sudden sharp shock of curiosity which she had thrust aside in the light of more important events, but this second glimpse of writing she couldn't read, meeting her eyes now with her mind filled with damning bits of information, now with her heart sore with suspicion—

Plainly once again the hand of God!

Time was when Samuel himself would have said so though he talked nowadays in a more worldly strain. When at church, for instance, he was more apt to remark the beauty of the faces he saw than the sermons he heard.

He had changed—but so had she!

CHAPTER IX

A MERE gesture, the slipping of his hand between her eyes and the page upon which he was writing, had sent one thought whizzing in her brain to the exclusion of all others. Every corner of it was at work to find a key to unlock his enigma of signs and symbols. All else was momentarily suspended.

Just what she expected to discover she didn't know. In the old days he used to write of the Navy, his chief interest then, and of the court, and of ordinary matters. She remembered that he would interlard his phrases with French words that he got from her. And they had some fun with Spanish which neither of them could brag of knowing. Foreign words he used to write out in long hand—boldly—and proper names. She had often told him it was imprudent.

Lord, how many years since then—since the time when it was his habit to explain all to her, consulting her as to new characters, instructing her as to how they could improve upon the old ones! He had even adopted several of her signs. She could decipher whole pages of shorthand if she so minded; but it would take hours—days.

To be sure he knew that in a single glance she

could come at nothing. Again she saw his hand slipping over the page. The gesture had been unconscious—no doubt of it. She had come upon him unexpectedly. He thought she had gone to bed. As a matter of fact, she had. The scratching of his pen had been sufficient to entice her out of it.

Like a flash it came to her!—There was a name on that page in plain writing—a name he didn't want her to see! It flamed before her eyes—a red flag entangled in a net of suspicion.

She began suddenly, as one may after ten years of daily contact with a person, to contemplate Will Hewer from a new point of view, with new interest, very much as though she had just discovered him. In so far as his probable present use to her was concerned she had.

She approached him carefully, apparently carelessly—where in his spare moments he was certain to be found, among Samuel's books, cataloguing—a never ending task—filing, pasting, numbering, dusting. Yes, there he was, simple, devoted, but not to be driven, and not always as simple as people thought.

She flitted around among the books, dropping into irrelevant talk as to her husband and the pride she took in his knowledge and advancement.

Hewer was used to her moods. This was a nice one. It wouldn't last, but why not meet it like a fair day in April—enjoy the sun while it was out!

"'Tis the part of a wife to know what is in her husband's mind, so to be able to converse with him, even to surprise him some day with her learning," said she reflectively.

From that she became eloquent as to her duties, quoting Samuel, expressing herself as thankful that she had a husband who wanted his wife to be acquainted with more than her prayer book and her cooking recipes.

So naturally she reviewed her own virtues.

"Even the music that I had no great love for I practised, trying to give pleasure with a song or two. Music scales, music lessons—lessons in singing—lessons on the flageolet. For him I did it, all for him—he muttering 'poor wretch,' actually vexed at me, and showing it, because I had an ear not good for all occasions."

Just what Hewer expected—one minute crying her husband up extravagantly, the next acknowledging that same, but not with the same graciousness. Impossible ever to tell which state she would dwell in longest.

It was true that Samuel had railed at her for not being musical, but later, that self-same night, she remembered, he had snuggled up to her, blessing her for having in mind only to please him. In truth, it was not an over-warm night that he had snuggled close; it was rather cold—still—

She smiled faintly as she sat thinking of those far-off days and how she had struggled first with

the heavens and then with the two terrestrial hemispheres, travelling in and out, from island to island on those globes over there at Hewer's elbow, that Samuel had purchased at such great expense.

Hewer nodded over his paste pot vigorously. Indeed he remembered. And the turn she had had at penmanship with Mr. Cocker—did he remember that? And at mathematics with Mr. Cooper? Samuel lacking skill in mathematics she had spent many a wearisome afternoon over sums in addition and subtraction and the acquiring of the multiplication table; he hearing it to her, she hearing it to him,—that being his way of learning.

No one could say she wasn't educated—no one! She dwelt upon that.

Why, on their honeymoon itself he had acquainted her with the works of her own countryman Montaigne.

"So pleased he was in those days with my company and our general enjoyment one with another. Better than most couples."

An indulgent, mocking smile played on her lips as she sat nodding at Will Hewer, talking of moderation and loyalty and frankness and the frailty of human beings.

She had a good memory. If it hadn't been for the master—she knew Will Hewer often got that far, but, loyal soul that he was, no further.

Her eyes travelled along the shelves of the mahogany presses from the "Book of Martyrs" to the

new Bible with silver bosses, and paused at the Hon. Robert Boyle's work—"Some Considerations Touching the Style of the Holy Scriptures."

"A very fine piece and so we turned over to dream of it," said she with a little ripple of amusement.

"Each day I set myself a stint so that he might be pleased with my company." She had even learned about fine timber and the nature of dealing with it. She remembered a bout at that at four in the morning, verily!

The lips curved again as she recalled that he did tell her she took it with ease and pleasure.

"Ay, Will Hewer."

"Indeed, madam, I have heard him say it."

She seemed really to be pleading with him to tell her she had done her duty. She knew he thought nothing could ever go wrong in that household while she—poor wretch—so doted on the master. Ah, yes, well—

"As when I read 'L'École des Filles,'" she burst out suddenly. "Yes, before he burnt it. Oh, you'll not find it on the shelves—it was under his mattress I came across it. It taught me much as to manners of the bedroom. Shocking! But once for information' sake it does no harm, Will Hewer."

She was fairly giggling with mischief now as she exclaimed, "His very expressions I made my own!"

"You did, madam," said Hewer gravely.

In his hand she caught sight of Samuel's Chaucer,

calf bound with brass clasps, that had cost so much she had been forced to deprive herself of a much coveted bit of lace.

Lace!

"Not a piece like it to be had nowheres!" The shopwoman's voice hammered again in her ears.

"Samuel is so clever," she observed presently. "I am ever put to it not to fall behind. Doubtless in his papers are wise thoughts,—thoughts to equal the wisdom of any here, thoughts that I feel as his wife I should share."

As to that Hewer didn't trouble to answer; wifely duties were not in his line.

Somewhat later, while the house was still in a whirlwind of confusion with preparations for Samuel's journey, she took occasion to remark: "My husband thinks I am but a poor fool because I asked him if Navy reports were ever secret."

"Not a foolish question at all," grunted Hewer.

"No?" She apparently all innocence. "Well—are they?"

"Secret?" said he.

"I mean would they be made out in secret writing?"

"You mean set down in shorthand?"

"Yes—yes—I should have said shorthand."

He explained in more words than seemed necessary that one wrote in shorthand to be transcribed later.

"A quick road to a long end." He smiled at her as she sat wrinkling her brows.

"Are there people who know shorthand?" she asked abruptly.

"Are there?—Dear lady!" This was an amused protest.

She persisted. "Besides you and Samuel—are there?"

"Most certainly."

"Who?"

"Learned men and scholars like your husband and myself."

He hadn't an idea what she was driving at but on general principles he tried to laugh her off.

"Name me one," she dropped with a great show of indifference.

What did she want to know that for?

Not so simple as many thought him. But she was ready with an explanation, a plausible one, and before she had finished she had him laughing. She showed him her latest French book—"L'Etat de France"—Samuel's present. In a whisper she acknowledged she was not so skilled in the tongue as once, and would fain have some help. She told with great fun how she had faltered in her interview with Lady Sandwich's wench. Not for the world would she have it get to Samuel's ears—but, if the truth be confessed, she needed considerable brushing up as to her vocabulary.

That sounded fair enough. Since he himself

couldn't help her he referred her to one who could, one at the sign of the Spread Eagle.

"Close by, that?"

"In Bread Street, a good shop kept by the successor to Milton."

"Oh, the poet!"

"The poet's father, a fair poet the son, though surly."

"So Samuel says." Then after a moment, "Does Samuel go there—to that one?"

"No—no—he goes to one at the 'Change, and to another at Paternoster Row."

"There are many then?"

"You cannot count them, dear lady, they are everywhere, in every book shop."

"And all can read shorthand—I mean French?" she asked in open wonder.

"In all book shops there are scriveners and learned men who can translate, transcribe—"

Enough for that day. She had taken a step in the right direction—preparing the way she called it.

Samuel was off at last. Will Hewer, who was to join him presently after discharging a number of left over commissions and last orders, stood at the door of his chief's study gaping in amazement.

The mistress, looking like an avenging houri, was there before him. Within the very hour of her husband's departure he found her poring over his papers, scattering his notebooks this way and that,

pulling bits of his memoranda from their special shelves where he had them stowed away against the time he should be ready for them.

She looked up at him with strange eyes, cheeks in a glow of excitement, deeply coloured as her magenta morning gown slipping off her shoulders, the great sleeves of it thrown back from her rounded white arms to leave her hands free.

"I'll come at it!" she cried.

"Madam, at what, for the love of God?"

Oh, Hewer had the master's phrases at the tip of his tongue even as she had!

"Yes, by the help of God!" she cried. "Long enough I've been a fool, Will Hewer,—long enough I've waited—"

He stood before her puzzled, but even more he was frightened. He had seen her torn by suspicion and in every stage of anger, but this was a new turn. Why the master's papers?

What on earth did she look for? His papers—how dared she?

At that moment and at all others he was her friend, her devoted, admiring friend, she knew that, he didn't have to tell her so; but he was also Samuel's loyal servant, he didn't have to tell her that either.

She went on tossing pencils and pens to one side, pushing books out of her way. The ink horn was in peril. Hewer removed it.

"I vow you make a mistake, dear madam," he

said gently, "a grave mistake, to meddle with private matters—serious matters—the honourable annals of great councils, figures gathered arduously after days and nights of anxiety. Much labour went to it," he went on gravely. "When you were sleeping your husband was at work, rising at four of a morning. Give o'er, dearest madam; take heed. Never have you risen in the morning early unless it was to gather May dew—quite properly. Only lately some one made comparison of your skin to a peach—" But this time compliments availed nothing.

She was not listening to a word he was saying. She was thinking only that he could help her as no one else if he would, loyal, faithful Will—if he would. How to come at him in proper fashion—unawares for the moment, without rousing suspicion? She had been too eager, too precipitate, letting her temper carry her away.

"You know what the master's been through," Hewer was saying—"you know—you above all others."

Proper or not she had made up her mind. Forcing a smile she sank into the chair behind her. She pushed her curls back into a becoming line, pulled her gown slightly over—not too far—and assumed an air of calmness in spite of an annoying fluttering at her heart. Her first task was to soothe him gently away from suspicion.

"Most discerning advice, dear Will Hewer! I'm

glad you've not gone to-day with Samuel on his jaunt. You are very right and wise, full of good counsel which I need."

Hewer settled down into a seat more at ease. Her sudden mad outburst was evidently over,—at least there was a momentary lull to be thankful for. Once again he compared her in his mind to an April day, the right sort of an April day—clouds with the sun just behind, the sun chasing the clouds.

One couldn't blame her for being fretful, dear lady. She had cause. But it was difficult to come at just what or how much she knew. Her broad white brow, her tender eyes, her childish pouting mouth, her little assumption every now and then of French ways and manners—a dear innocent soul as ever a lady should be. If he were to marry some day, it was no secret, this same dear lady would be the pattern of his wife. From their first acquaintance she had captivated him.

"Your master keeps a journal," she said unexpectedly, but gently. Nothing in the statement to occasion suspicion or worry. Her voice was velvet. Even if she had no ear for music she had a softness of tone when she spoke low as now. It could caress, soothe, delight—as now.

"A journal," she repeated.

Now what on earth?

"You know it?" she went on ever gently.

Hewer shrugged—he, too, sparring for time.

So far her tone sweet—sweet as Barbary sugar.

Yet he hesitated, as she felt sure he would. Oh, he was no fool, far from it. He knew more Latin than her husband himself and was equally good at shorthand, quicker, and learned in all the business of the office, occupying there, as well as in their household, a position of entire trust. She didn't minimise his capacity, not for a moment—a confidential, indispensable clerk, a man of wide experience in difficult affairs—an able accountant. There were a few people, she was one, who realised that with all his simplicity he stood back of his chief in many matters of import, a bulwark of strength and common sense.

"For all it is in secret writing," said she, "you must certainly know its contents."

"Shorthand," corrected Will Hewer, "not secret."

"Mm—yes—we studied it together once, you remember?"

He did indeed.

There was no harm in acknowledgement of this. He remembered well when he was no adept himself and she was almost as good at it. And the master was beginning. Oh, yes—yes—all of them struggling and she as quick as any.

"Then you dropped out," said he.

"I did, but not so far as to have forgotten all."

There was something significant in the way she said that—evidently she intended it to sound like a warning.

"And you went on—on till now you have knowledge of every sign—naught could be hidden from you, Will Hewer."

Smooth but cutting her tone.

"My husband's journal is in secret writing," she said again.

"Why not?" grunted Hewer. "Shorthand is no longer uncommon, we use it at the office every day."

"Oh, so you know—you know—"

"That the master keeps a journal?" Surely there was naught amiss in that. "He never told me, but you cannot be with a man day after day, live with him, sit by him, and not know. Many men keep a record of their days. It's common, madam, most common. There's Lord Coventry that spoke only t'other day of his journal; and Mr. Evelyn, a serious man; and Sir William Rider that hath kept one these forty years. I think 'tis high time I kept one of my own."

Will Hewer trying to joke. He was ever clumsy at that, like an elephant playing with a kitten. "What could I not tell in it of this and that and you?"

"Do you know the contents of my husband's journal?" Mrs. Pepys broke in.

"'Tis private, madam—a journal is private matter."

"Private? Not in the old days. Many's the time he'd sit writing by candle light on a cold morning till past one, and I'd call out: 'Samuel, come to

bed!' And he'd answer: 'I've taken oath to ease my mind of five or six days' notes.' Then just as I'd be dropping off to sleep I'd hear—'Wife, what day was it Creed came to the house?' Or 'What day was it we were in the Park and you remarked—' Oh, many a remark of mine is in it! Or there'd be some one's name he'd want to come at. And I'd hark back and remember it was the day I wore my ill-matched ribbons with my best-hanging skirt; the while he'd be muttering it was the day we had a powdered leg of pork or a sluttish dinner. Oh, at that time he was open enough about his journal—nothing private—till lately."

"He writes no doubt of more serious matters to-day as great men must. Navy affairs—"

"Serious?" she burst in. "Does he?"

He wished mightily she would not throw his words back at him in that mocking tone!

"Serious? Did you know he wrote in it of women? Serious indeed!"

She fluttered loose sheets of paper up and down in a way to set his nerves on edge.

"Serious?—Navy matters?" she cried with a sudden hard ugly laugh.

Followed a pause punctuated with scornful sniffs. Then she flung at him: "Names of women you'll find here in these pages writ in plain God-fearing writing—sluts all of them. Pierce on this page, Knepp—Knepp—Knepp on this, Martin—Hughes—"

She thrust the papers under his eyes.

"There,—and there,—and there,—"

He glanced at them,—he who knew every sign of the chief's hand, every mark of John Shelton's system—he who had worked with him day after day, night after night, perfecting, revising, dictating—he to Pepys—Pepys to him; he always the better—Samuel averring 'twas his eyes kept him more backward—he that had made a key to every character.

Elizabeth never took her eyes off his face as he read.

"As if I didn't know he had always kept a journal," she sneered.

Again that unwifely tone.

"The year we were married he began. Oh, yes, he'd read me many a bit from it. Very proud he was of it—wanted my help in the looking up of certain words. Many a new one we learned! Epicurism, for instance, is one I've never forgot! I thinking it was only to be used in connection with hog's harslet or some such, but Samuel insisting it could serve right properly to describe a good sleep—"

"Well?" grunted Hewer.

"Now not one word do I know! All's hidden—but I mean to come at it through you—through you, Will Hewer."

If she had put a gun to his head he couldn't have been more indignant or louder in protest.

"Last thing at night, first thing in the morning, scribbling—scribbling," she resumed, "pages upon pages! His doings day by day. Martin—Knepp —Bagwell—and now this, the latest. Here on this page—the date but yesterday—this word—Deb—"

So that was it at last—the new maid!

"For the love of God don't tear it," he cried.

"Through you—you, Will Hewer, I'll come at every word!"

Not a glint of sunshine in her face now, not a note of melody in her voice. Hard and tense both.

"If not through you then through the learned men you told me of but yesterday," she went on slowly. "I can make out some of it myself, the rest —you—you—"

She looked at him long, deeply, in a manner most unaccustomed. He remained silent, she knew, because he feared to trust himself to speak. A new and startling sensation for Will Hewer.

"Ever you have been part of my happiness, ever you have stood between me and danger," she let fall gently, even sadly.

Her voice was once more soothing. He saw that so far as she was concerned thev might continue calmly, at least for the moment.

"You remarked the name of Knepp," said he. "Why not? In these pages you'd expect to find mention of plays. Look, the name of one writ here in longhand—'The Alchymist.'" Hewer knitted

his brows—"And mention of Pierce that did dine —did dine;—'good' here is the word 'good'—"

He turned to another page. "Yes," he said frankly, "here is the name Knepp—and here after it—'The Northern Castle'—in longhand. You see, madam! I must study it over. After Knepp are the words 'mean' and 'sorry.'"

"Samuel said so," breathed Elizabeth.

She saw his eyes fly to the next sentence. He paused and pulled up quickly.

"There, there," he said, "put the papers back—put them back—forget."

"Forget"—she dwelt on that word looking at him again strangely. "Forget—"

He seemed to have made an impression at last. She was off on quite a new tack.

"There is one thing I can never forget," she said, half closing her eyes as though to recall the memory better.—"You—you—my dear Will, ever standing between me and trouble. What a dear, queer, serious boy you were!"

She pictured him when he first came to Samuel, smooth-faced, open-eyed,—she not eighteen, he a boy, tall, slender, eager, understanding. Ah, the flattery of her description!

"And you used to drop words in French," said he.

"I knew you cared to hear them from my lips," said she.

A long dangerous silence.

"Do you remember the day that Samuel was jealous of you—my friend?" She took his hand.

"Jealous? Dear madam, you jest." He pulled away gently.

She recalled it smiling, pretending to blush at the mere memory.

"I'd asked you to come over and Samuel was in such a toss over it that I got frightened—remember? And told him it was the maids you had been to see—fibbed for you! Lud, what a rage he was in! I used to be afraid of him, Will; so did you."

"Put the papers back, madam!"

"Only the other day that lovely diamond locket that you brought me—why did you?"

"Because it was beautiful and I wanted you to have it," he said simply.

"He made me give it back to you, Will. I didn't want to," she purred in his ear.

"And Samuel used to train us—you and me. We're what he made us, Will. Do you remember? Poor boy—your first long coat and how you swaggered! My first light locks— Ah, how unhappy I was when he struck you!"

"You were always good to me, madam!"

"And once he struck me!"

Another silence—dangerous—

"And you came into the house just after and found me crying. I'm crying now, Will, in my heart—I must know all, I mean it."

Almost distracted by the sweetness of her, by the sadness of her, he still sat gravely silent.

She whispered in his ear. "All will go unless you yourself give me the key—right properly—swiftly."

Suddenly he felt the gentle pressure of her hand on his shoulder. He let it rest there just a moment, not longer, yet she must have known that he trembled under her touch as one who had lost control.

He turned away frowning, not at her—at himself. When he turned back it was to declare bluntly that he could tell her nothing.

"These notes are for the most part reports," said he; "dry details, humble truths, annals of no interest to you, madam."

Standing now to add emphasis to her words she cried: "All will go unless you give me the key."

"Go? Go where?" he asked at last.

"To the first book shop—there to be translated by a learned man!"

"But I have told you these are trifles—not worth the sending!"

"These sheets go this day to be put into plain God-fearing writing, unless—"

"Never, madam! Put them back, put them back!"

"Tell me or they go!"

Good Lord, that it should come to this!

She grew more and more melodramatic.

"I swear, as Heaven is my witness, I'll publish his writings to the world if you do not give me the

key—I swear it—I'll go to the first book shop on the street and have all translated, word for word!"

If only the master had never gone! In a few hours he himself would be journeying to meet him—the coach would be off betimes the day following. Meanwhile there was the possibility of her scattering the sacred leaves of his sacred journal to the first scrivener in the first book shop. More than a possibility—a certainty—by this time he knew she meant it.

"I swear—" she began again.

To stop her he held out his hand for the sheets. Better he than a stranger! A pile of them she placed there. The master's private papers in the hands of his clerk! If he knew!

In an incredibly short time Hewer announced that he was ready. Sitting at the master's desk, his hands full of notes, his eyes alight with evident satisfaction, he begged her to listen calmly.

" 'This Christmas I judge it fit to look over all my papers and books and to tear all that I find either boyish or not to be worth keeping or fit to be seen if it should please God to take me away suddenly.' "

Carefully, not too glibly, Hewer pronounced the words, lingering over them almost triumphantly, rejoiced to have found at the first try matter so innocent.

"Christmas day"—he went on. "Tearing of

papers—listen to this: 'If it should please God to take me away suddenly'—you can hear him saying it—" Hewer broke off exultantly.

"Ay, ay."—In a surprisingly acquiescent mood, the mistress!

Hewer went on and on, laboriously picking his way. He believed the day was saved at last. The master would never know what peril he had been in unless—somehow he must acquaint him, without of course implicating his wife.

"Everything is in his journal, madam, even the ages of his grandfather's children and their children in longhand—writ out plain for all to read. And on this page are charms, madam." He held the papers towards her. "Charms against cramps and other ills—innocent charms in shorthand."

"I remember," said she slowly. "I remember it well!—His memory failing—mine helping."

"Ay, 'Jesus that was of a Virgin born'— Here I've writ it out for you."

"No need!" she exclaimed, thrusting his paper aside, "I know it by heart!

> " 'Jesus that was of a Virgin born
> Was pricked both with nail and thorn.
> It neither wealed nor belled, rankled nor boned
> In the name of Jesus no more shall this.' "

"Excellent, madam, your memory serves you well!"

"Let me have the page," she said as with a sudden flash of some new determination.

Gladly he gave it back into her hands.

"I'll be ready," he said, "with more later. I must be off now to end matters at the office."

"More of the same kind," she observed softly; and with one of her smiles to warm the cockles of his heart, let him go—loyal, faithful Will Hewer.

Samuel journeying from Brampton to Bath, from Huntingdon to Bowles! His wife hot on his trail! He drinking and eating with full satisfaction; she ploughing her way through an enigma of signs and symbols; he in great content and tranquillity; she fuming, sweating, swearing, transcribing, comparing, elucidating. Hour upon hour, checking up, writing down; Mercer assisting—Mercer who nursed a grievance, Mercer who felt she had been discarded for Deb.

D—Deptford—Deb—D—

Up and down from D to Z and A to D they travelled, working their way laboriously, now at one end of the alphabet—now at the other.

"After dinner to our business of my microscope to be shown some of the observables of that and down to my office to look in a dark room with my glasses and tube—"

Hewer was back reading with considerable hesitancy, as though anxious to give all accurately.

In the candle light, an alluring figure simply gowned in her old black silk that never would wear

out, a brilliant crimson scarf outlining her shoulders, Elizabeth sat listening with a mocking, indulgent smile on her lips. The dear man—what pains he must have been at to find these proper bits!

"Mention of Mr. Spong," said he.

"M—skip that," said she.

"And Dr. Croone—introducing a bit about nutriments—the dog that had his blood taken out and the other that had the blood let in."

She wasn't interested but she remained calm.

"As to petticoats of sarcanette," said he, smiling —" 'We saw some new fashioned petticoats of sarcanette with black broad lace printed round the bottom and before, very handsome, and my wife had a mind to one of them!' "

"Never mind that—go on—not that!" She broke in this time impatiently.

He started afresh shuffling his papers.

"With his friend Creed and 'had a most delicate dish of curds and cream.' "

He noticed she had picked up some pages for herself. He looked his over with a great show of carelessness and went on: " 'As to neat houses on the banks of the river Thames, inhabited by gardeners, supplying London and Westminster markets with asparagus, artichokes, cauliflowers, musk melon. And there we sat and sang and talked and ate. My wife out of humour as she always is when this woman is by.' Observe, madam, he has remarked—"

She was sitting upright in her chair now;—nothing calm about her—not from her feet to her head.

"Go on," said she, "go on!"

"The end of that day, madam," he observed gently.

"Go on—go on to her that is the pretty maid Betty," she cried, dropping her shawl suddenly and springing to her feet—*'elle* being *très jolie!'* Go on to Deb Willett—here—under this 11th day—'whom I love should be'—I'll come at what with time—with time! His pretty Knepp and Turner and Marshall—and twenty others! All here, all here! Kisses—kisses—kisses—love making and kisses! While his wife, poor wretch! Her ribbons ill matched, poor soul! Her petticoat basely laced with old black lace,—poor wretch, poor wretch! 'Betty whispered me behind the tergo of her fan!' —*'Sarah loves me dearly.'*—'To St. Margaret's in hope of seeing Betty Michell that I love.'—'Ann and Beck Marshall—the pretty ones!—and Mistress Bagwell—I blew out the candle and kissed her!' 'Mrs. Lane—had a kiss or two of her!' "

From the different ends and corners of the room, a sombre, tragic figure, pushing aside tables and chairs, she hurled her accusations, momentarily halting to cry: "We'll see—we'll see!"

"See what, madam?" faltered Hewer.

"A word misses now, a word here, a word there—"

Abruptly she paused and broke into a mysterious sing-song:

"Jesus that was of a Virgin born
Was pricked both with nail and thorn."

She made triumphant passes in the air: "A—B—C—D—the a's—so.—The b's this way and always an e—this way!"—

God help Samuel Pepys!

A harmless page of rhymes had supplied the key! —Rhymes against the ills of the flesh, rhymes that his wife knew by heart set down in shorthand—in curves, in half curves, in dots, in hooks, in dashes, in characters of his own invention. She had come at them all for herself. The mystery of the long and the short she had solved for herself.

"Ah, Will Hewer, some day when you're married try not to think your wife an arrant fool. Give her credit for some sense. Write her not down—'poor wife—poor wretch'—and so treat her. Take lesson from me that know too much and not enough."

"Too much, madam?" Hewer echoed faintly.

"To think that in my own house!"

"In faith you take matters too seriously—" he blurted out.

"A maid—she that was a cook but a fortnight past! And in my own house!"

"There's naught in it," murmured Hewer,

"naught. He says the girl is pretty—naught else."

"Her petticoat of silk—her matching beads—God in heaven, how they must mock me!"

"Who?"

"In the shops, in the play houses, in the coffee houses, everywhere—and now this—a record of his days!"

She paced up and down the room growing every minute more and more violent; in her rage scattering loose pages and broken sentences. They needn't think she was blind! Once, yes, but not now. Her husband had taught her to reason, to think for herself. Lord, she'd have been a fool if all his education had accomplished naught!

"You cannot give a woman understanding," she cried, "and then all of a sudden take it away from her!"

Hewer followed her about the room endeavouring to restore order. He moved a chair from her path, removed himself and sat down in a corner—dumb now in his consternation.

"That any man would think his wife would be satisfied not to know what he writes in secret! Once when I asked him he answered fair enough: 'I keep the record of my days.' I let it go at that. But now, as any wife—any wife I say—I must make it my business to come at all—all."

"You are but a woman, madam," said Hewer lamely, when finally he could get in a word. "To-morrow you will go to gather May-dew early in

the morning. May-dew, fresh from the grass to bathe the face with! You will feel different—"

"I'll not waste my time on May-dew—not now—not now—not while he goes bandying filthy coarse words and brutal jokes, conversation for orange girls and tiring-room hussies—shameless women—gutter girls!"

"Madam, what know you of such?"

"I am the wife of Samuel Pepys—'tis time—high time for me to know— High time for me to follow in his footsteps! I must know the nature of many things that now I only guess."

"Such knowledge is not for you, madam. A hint of it will drive him mad—"

" 'Tis a wife's duty to know all—" said she dully.

Poor Hewer; there could be no doubt it was serious. The peace of the little household he loved was in imminent danger and he was powerless.

"The patient Queen is a chicken-livered fool! Lady Sandwich an old-fashioned ignoramus!"

Back and forth, alone in her closet, Elizabeth Pepys paced trying to find relief.

Not to know indeed! But now that she did know? Now that she had penetrated his dirty literary trick, now that she had the damning evidence in her hand, how should she meet it? Over and over she went the same round. Close her eyes? Pretend ignorance? Remain in her closet and weep in secret?

Not she—no, nor Samuel neither! No secret silent suffering in the Pepys family! Not for them! Through the long years they had leaped into scenes as naturally as some people creep into their shells, hurling their abuse through open doors, over the banisters, up the stairway—anywhere—everywhere.

In a single dramatic breath she vowed to lock herself in and starve to death; to vanish forever into the wilds of London, or into the gay little damp river she so loved. One cold plunge—mm—yes—yes—if some one should be there to pull her out!

No, she'd live and enter a nunnery. White robes—she looked well in white! Conscience stricken relatives; her locks falling under relentless scissors; last farewells.

A vision of Samuel consoling himself checked the flow of her tears.

And to think there had actually been a time when she had so roused him that he had prayed his jealousy might be false! How it had once thrilled her to hear him cry out: "It makes a very hell in my mind which I pray the God of Heaven to remove!"

Lord, how angered he was to discover she lifted her skirt just a wee bit too high and let her kerchief fall just a wee bit too low! His wife!

And his indignation at the impudence of Lord Brouncker's mistress to dare to set herself on an equality with her—his wife! On no account must they meet! His wife and that woman—never!

Meanwhile came a day at church when he had pointed out a great lady—Lady Carlisle. He had called her a fine woman, fine appearing, and then whispered in her ear a word in connection with her, a word she had once thought reserved only for women one never met. Then, coming out, he had acknowledged her salutation with pride.

Still a little later he had gone pleasuring with the same Brounckers. And again—and again—The person of his wife still guarded but he not so loud in his condemnation. And then the night when they met—over most handsome food—the mistress of Lord Brouncker and the wife of Samuel Pepys! He had forgotten that he had ever pronounced it mighty disgraceful for my Lord to have his folly open to the world—forgotten he had called him rotten and false—forgotten the names he had called the woman—forgotten in the light of his pleasure his wish to preserve the innocence of his wife.

She slipped down the years to the time when she too said she knew everything—inexact phrase that then, too, meant a complete education in one thing primarily.

She actually began to wonder what he'd do if she were to put him in a position for men to say she was another man's wench like Castlemaine, whom he so doted on—Castlemaine, the King's mistress, who had threatened to make public his letters to her and so brought him to terms and routed a rival.

What a state Samuel himself had been in when she had written down the disagreeables of her life, fearful lest some one should see them!

Dabbing her eyes with a sopping ball of a handkerchief she repeated: "The thing's to drive him mad!"

Over and over she went at that from every angle. She had gone back to review the past so that she might the better go forward to prepare for the future.

Plots from the smutty ink of writers revealing a procession of deceived wives in fantastic scenes of revenge passed before her eyes.

Plays—plays—plays—Lord knows Samuel had treated her to an intensive course of them! She lived them over now:—scenes of anger—scenes of repentance—scenes of recrimination—scenes exploiting noble heroines. From the vermilion lips of one of them she plucked a phrase:

"God be thanked I have time to lay my story handsomely," she cried, "God be thanked!"

CHAPTER X

HER story!

Much mystery, much whispering, much running back and forth went to the laying of it.

Such a deal to be done and so little time to do it in!

Notes to be written. Messages to be sent. A kerchief to be pressed; a spot to be rubbed out; a ribbon to be renewed; the house to be cleaned from attic to cellar. (That would have been done while Samuel was away in any event.) All hands busy scouring, dusting, sweeping, polishing. Even the long-haired puppy was washed.

Some one must see to it that the chimneys didn't smoke; there must be fires in all the rooms.

And above all there was a collation to be prepared.—Cheese cakes, other cakes, puff paste, pies, tarts to be baked; sillabubs to be whipped, and drinks to be brewed.

Consultations with Mercer took place behind closed doors. Candles burned half the night. Cupboards were emptied; drawers ransacked, chairs strewn with every kind of raiment; new combinations discussed; the most becoming style of headdress decided upon.

Till at last, inevitably, a certain Wednesday came around!

The servants were all on duty flitting in and out the orderly rooms.

The mistress disappeared up the stairs half dressed. A general let down. The mistress's head reappeared over the balustrade—one eye down stairs, one eye up stairs.

Something overlooked here or there. A new order to be given.—Confusion and more work for every one.

Mercer excited, Deb excited; Tom, Jane, all excited—flustered too, and a bit disgruntled.

Once again Mrs. Pepys rustled her skirts and disappeared. Gone for good. High time!

Mercer loved issuing orders. Her lips were a tight line. She wore her best dress, shiny black, highly respectable, with a kerchief neatly folded over her flat bosom.

"The madam said you might wear your new beads, Deb. Lud, you've them on!"

Deb never spoke without tossing her head these days, though she often tossed it without speaking, as now. It helped to declare one's position.

"You are to bring in the fruit and the oranges," said Mercer importantly. "I'll attend to the wine and syrup, and Jane the cakes. Get you down

below, Tom, and see that all visitors come up. It's time—all's ready!"

Deb tossed and hesitated, hesitated and tossed. At last she could hold in no longer.

"A housewarming, is it?"

Any one with half an eye could tell Mercer knew. She carried her head that way; the very eyes of her looked to see if the others knew she knew.

"'Tis some sort of a party," she admitted.

Deb held off another minute. Then, at the bursting point, she crossed over to a drawer in the cupboard and pulled out a box.

"The counters," said she.

"Counters?"

"Will it be 'Gleek' or 'Beggar my Neighbour?'"

Over the landing above, Mrs. Pepys, her head puffed where it wasn't curled, leaned out. But Mercer knew her business. Straighter than ever, and more tightly girthed she cried: "Put 'em back. Naught was said of cards or card tables. No, nor chess nor dice nor parlour forfeits. Do as you're bid—no more, no less."

Something incomprehensible was going on in this household. It was plain Deb knew things too, but not enough. If only she could come at what they suspected—how much!

This time the girl kept her head still and tried ingratiation.

"You'll sing, mayhap?"

"Naught was said of music."

Then there'd be no dancing! Inconceivable!

It was! From her point of vantage Elizabeth Pepys had more than her share of the girl's misgivings. A party at the house of Samuel Pepys and no music! In a cold perspiration she waited, crouching at the top of the stairs from where she could hear all, see enough and imagine the rest.

A noise at the door—the first arrival, greeted by Mercer!

"Good morrow, madam, pray enter."

Mrs. Bagwell, a tall dame dressed sedately in unyielding grey taffeta, and Mercer, so important that she could scarce bend for her curtsey, faced each other.

Deb had disappeared after one disgruntled glance.

The tall dame looked about the room. She did more than look, she indulged in what might be described as a searching survey, sweeping every nook and corner before she brought her eyes back to the menial.

If ever eyes spoke these said—"Menial."

"Good morrow. I remember you, I think. To be sure—a capable person and God-fearing, your master has told me so. 'Mercer,' he said, 'can be trusted.' Mercer, it is?"

The menial simpered and nodded. No fault to find there—she was perfectly civil and quiet on her

feet. The dame it was who stood shifting uneasily.

For the first time in her life Mrs. Pepys rejoiced over Mercer's exasperating habit of remaining silent. Amazing how they always had habits, the serving class! They were either too officious, too communicative, or this sort.

Often enough she had heard Mistress Bagwell on the subject to know her mind now.

But at this moment she only remarked: "Where is he?"

"The master?"

Oh, she would—she would;—the kind that made you repeat every trifling question, explain every obvious thought! Peeping out at the top of Mistress Bagwell's head her hostess smothered her chuckles.

"Yes, the master."

"We never know, madam—that is, just where he is—unless he tells us."

"Very properly— Men have their ways, good and bad, but mostly good, I find. Mayhap I only draw good forth." This to the silent air.

"Hang the man—to bring me here and keep me waiting! A devil of a mess I call it—damn his impertinence!"—

Mrs. Pepys caught sight of Bagwell's expressive back (quite sufficient to give a clue to what she was thinking), but Mercer caught only her soft voice questioning.

"Has he sent any message?"

"No, madam, no."

"I'm a church woman, tried and true," said the voice; "it's church business that we shall talk of while his wife's away."

The menial blinked her eyelids—another habit—and coughed. Mistress Bagwell had once lamented having such a one in her employ, given to the same disagreeable manifestations—she had got rid of her—but this one—well, thank God, she didn't own her.

Aloud she said: "He'll be here presently—I'll wait."

And wait she did, sitting stiffly on a velvet chair, too disgruntled, too uneasy to make herself comfortable, swallowing her oaths—(to be guessed at only since they were inaudible).

Plain to be seen this silent Abigail got into her very gizzard. Why didn't she say something?

"His wife I understand has gone abroad. A dear lady—and a good one.—Church-going, discreet, a fitting wife for so great a man."

The menial stood attentive. Good Lord, was she going to stand there forever!

The dame fumbled in her bag and mumbled:

"I could have made no mistake—I'm sure not. Neither in the hour nor the day. No, I'm sure the word sent was this day—this afternoon—of a Wednesday—is this not Wednesday?"

Mercer echoed "Wednesday," with a downward inflection.

"Yes, here's the note; mayhap you've seen it?"

"No, madam."

She'd have sworn the wench smirked. Above, Elizabeth Pepys could feel her head throb as she pressed it to the hard rail of the corkscrew balustrade.

" 'Come to the house of Samuel Peeps, Seething Lane entrance' "—Mrs. Bagwell read aloud—" 'Something of import!' "

Silence—chunks of it. The kind you can hear when you're waiting for some one to say something. That's what dead silence is.

Mrs. Pepys caught her breath and held it.

Again the visitor: "He can't have intended his office. This is the Seething Lane entrance? T' other is—eh?—what?"

Mrs. Bagwell broke off suddenly, throwing her words out into the air—now no longer silent.

Through the door there burst unceremoniously two females, easily recognised by any woman of the world. Mrs. Bagwell quickly flung herself into a corner; Mrs. Pepys crouched and trembled.

"Here's the two of us as bid—one fairer nor t'other."

"Comparisons are odorous!"

They walked about adjusting their hats, swishing their skirts, on a tour of frank inspection. From then on there was not a detail sacred except Samuel's gilded books in their presses.

The big mirror over the mantel reflected them,

two overdressed hussies, making minute survey of the contents of the place, specially noting the silver spread out in the dining-room.

"Ah! great preparedness," announced the bolder by right of a louder voice and a heavier load of paint.

Mrs. Bagwell had shrunk into a sulky bundle of silk when finally the women pulled up before her.

"Laa, if there ain't another of us!" said one.

"I call it a dirty trick!" said her companion in a stage whisper.

Of the stage truly and no mistake this time!—Knepp, one of them; Beck Marshall, the other.

"Do we know her?" whispered Knepp.

"Not me!"

Mrs. Bagwell drew herself up. She called it that. It made her taller in any event and all she found to say was: "Madam!"

"There's two of us!" Evidently the dame's manner ruffled.

"Ladies!" This time Mrs. Bagwell curtseyed.

Knepp had a broad grin and a fine set of teeth. She showed them all and observed without resentment—"She has wit."

"I am a God-fearing woman belonging to no playhouse," said Bagwell proudly.

If sniffs of disdain could have withered her—But they didn't.

"I am here by invitation," she went on, "to speak of holy things."

"With him?"

"Impossible!"

The two women were now in fits of laughter. Trained actresses both, they made it seem uncontrollable.

"You've sure mistook the day," said one at last, appearing to make effort to recover.

For the moment they were all in the same box. With a chorus of "Wednesdays," they appealed to Mercer.

"Here, woman—you—you know me—Mistress Knepp! Where is he—your master?"

A shake of the head and an apologetic shrug the answer—

"Too much to ask of any one female," said Knepp. "Here's another! Did he leave aught—any message?—None? What, none?"

So there they were, the three of them, in varying degrees of temper.

Their invisible hostess nodded from her point on the landing. The house of Samuel Pepys was a pleasant one, comfortable, agreeable as to outlook, warm. No danger of their going. For her that was the important point.

"We'll stop and see it out," Knepp observed cheerfully in the deep rich contralto that so many men applauded.

"The three of us—a happy contented three!"

She had thrown off her long purple cloak revealing a much-ruffled plum-coloured skirt, held well in

above the hip line with a rigid, extremely low-cut body sheath. A little cap, tight to her head, was tied with ribbons of the shade of the lavender they were crying in the street at a ha'penny the bunch.

After a critical survey in the big mirror over the mantel she exclaimed with exaggerated appeal:

"Do, Beck dear, give me the loan of a bit of a patch! Drat it, I've a pimple on my chin!"

But it did without its cover this time.

The scene Elizabeth Pepys had planned was progressing. Stepping in at the door there was Mrs. Lane with a tiny shock dog cuddled in the folds of her cape. Following her came Betty Michell, Mrs. Pierce, Mrs. Allen—a company of expectant females all talking at once, giggling, exchanging salutations, pecking at one another's cheeks, shrieking their comments, filling the room with a mixture of musk and sandalwood, jessamy-scented gloves, trailing skirts and waving plumes.

"It looks like a wedding feast!"

"Which the bride?"

"Mercy on us, have we mistook the day?"

"Not me!"

"Wednesday! Wednesday!"

Mrs. Lane's voice rose above the others. "I'm mud to me neck!" she shrieked. "Such roads! I'd have travelled them on foot for no other man."

"Where is he?" they clamoured.

"Come what may I'm here for it!"

Mistress Knepp's patch was at last in its proper

place—a black star instead of a red lump. She settled back comfortably.

"Now you're here," she said, "I'd advise you to sit down and rest yourself."

"It is not rest I'm here for," cried Mrs. Lane.

They recognised their kind with shrieks of approval. Mistress Bagwell glowered and muttered.

In the dining-room one caught glimpses of cakes and oranges and silver tankards. Mercer, Deb, Jane, appeared and disappeared, carrying out, fetching in, placing dishes, wiping glasses, silent but busy, conscious of the mistress above. Watching—waiting—she was going through all the agonies of a temperamental star on a first night.

Above the din of talk a riot of thoughts shot through her brain.

"Should I have been below to receive them? Would it perhaps have been easier? What did I ever undertake it for? What's to be gained? Lud, if I could only vanish!"

Presently she looked down upon a graceful figure, in colour a blushing full-blown June rose under a great cartwheel of a hat, balanced on top of a mass of curls. Evidently an important figure, for every creature there below turned at the sound of her voice—a sweet voice—a famous voice—the voice of Nell Gwyn herself.

Exhaling health and rollicking good humour, she turned from one to the other, ignoring the envy of

their glances, or more properly rejoicing in it. Too clever to show surprise if she felt any, pleased apparently to see the crowd there, not a whit ashamed to be discovered, amused at their visible discomfiture—she pretended to believe they had assembled to welcome her.

With a "Good day" to this one; a "Howdy" to that one, a grimace to Beck Marshall and a "Kiss me, hussy" to Knepp, she rattled off a hundred words to the minute.

She had all the gossip of the greenroom at the tip of her tongue. She knew just what relation Knepp stood in to the Navy man. She knew the feud 'twixt her and Pierce. She knew just where to place Allen and Lane and Betty Michell and Beck Marshall—vulgar beast—

"Where is he?" she cried, anxious to add fuel to the fire. "'Look in,' said my message—'something of import.' I'm a-looking. Lud, what's a party without a man? Where's your 'Dapper Dicky, eh?' (Knepp glowered.) 'Sunburn me if Sammykins hasn't deserted us!'"

Nell delivered this in her sauciest epilogue manner, and spreading her voluminous rose-coloured skirts, sank into the only chair left empty, to enjoy the effect of it.

From the deep pocket at her side she took out a small mirror and placidly examined the tip of her tilted nose, her deeply tinted cheeks and the patches that said quite frankly: "Come to me."

"Listeners never hear good of themselves!" A hackneyed phrase in those days too, so that when Mrs. Pepys suddenly heard her name she felt, as her husband had so often expressed it, quite as though she were turning to water. It was Beck Marshall who first threw it into their midst with an emphasis that grated.

"I've come at it—he thought his woman being away he'd feed his vanity with the crowd of us!"

"Vanity!" cried Nell with an oath. "Cut my throat if it ain't Beck Marshall that gives it a new name!"

"Let's play him a trick and leave our respects for his wife!"

"Occasion her to take notice!"

"Open her eyes!"

"Acquaint him that he can't use us as he uses her."

"Poor creature!" It was Nell Gwyn. With all her heart her trembling, crouching hostess echoed the words.

"I pity her not!"

"Nor me!"

"If she can't keep him as has him, who can?"

"Has him? She!"

From then on whether they pronounced her Pepys, Peeps, or Peppis, she heard herself mocked at, pitied, scorned. She was amazed to find how well they knew her and her bit of history from her

very early beginnings. They had all seen her with or without Samuel; some of them had been to her house; Knepp, only a few weeks back, repeatedly; and Bagwell, whom she had been fool enough to believe wrapped up in her religion and her husband. What they didn't know—oh, they were an inventive lot!—they supplied *ad libitum*. Finally she heard that she herself knew nothing—nothing. That they repeated and repeated. They rubbed it in. Crouching above, dressed in all her finery, with her idiotic plan unfolding below, she agreed.

And then a voice from heaven! Nell Gwyn vowed she thought her sweet and pretty, and Samuel Pepys himself had spoken of her cleverness. With mighty oaths she declared it, held to it against Knepp that refused to listen.

"'Tis a blind," she cried, "he thinks her a fool."

"Yet guards her under lock and key! There's two sides to every fool!"

Nell grunted and chuckled and out-shrieked and out-lied. What a defender!

"This time he'll have to make it up to her, sure as I've a name to my body!"

The warning centred attention on their absent host.

"He swore 'twas me inspired him for his song!"

"Me too!"

"Dirty lout!"

Then one explained how he'd explain this day's

mixup—taking him off to the life. Samuel and his eternal vows!

Oh, if only he could hear them! His wife's courage mounted.

"The devil take me," cried Nell, "if any mortal can come up to him in the art of explaining!"

"And postponing—" cried Beck Marshall with an insinuating leer.

"Because you can't get the best of a man it's still there to be got," said Nell insolently. From that they started calling each other ugly names—each was a liar or worse.

"The Presbyter's praying daughter!" cried Nell.

"Lord Buckhurst's latest!"

They were like two fighting cocks.

From her hiding place their hostess, frightened almost to death, made frantic signs to Mercer to go in quickly—make any excuse, only go in.

A moment's pause.

Every one of them turned at sight of the woman—even Nell and Beck Marshall. Evidently they believed she had come to announce the master.

Some one suggested that they vanish all at the same time. Not Mrs. Bagwell! She vowed she'd stay.

"First come, first served!" said she, forgetting her church manners.

Presently, without warning, Elizabeth found herself listening to an unforgettable scene. Her cheeks

burned, and paled, her eyes flashed and lowered; she cowered in dismay, and hated herself for being there, for the polluting of her house—

It began—Heaven knows how! She heard them calling for the cards. Mercer, bidden to be on the alert, appeared at once and supplied a pack. They swept things from the big table and crowded about it—excited, eager. They began to cut—playing for something—big stakes evidently. They cut and re-cut, dealt and re-dealt.

They counted heads—eight.

"I'm out," cried Nell.

Evidently she had instituted herself umpire. She stood on a chair, cutting into the velvet. Intent upon this Elizabeth Pepys, the housewife, had missed something.

What she heard now sounded like an auction room or a scene out of a gambling den.

"An eighth for each! Divide fair!"

They were nudging one another and leering, growing freer and freer, more and more vulgar.

Mrs. Bagwell fanned violently.

"She's over hot at the thought of even a bit of him!" exclaimed one of the band.

"One round for the touch of his hand!"

"Glutton!"

Then she knew—his wife knew! A share of her husband the stake—Samuel Pepys Esquire!

She buried her face in her hands in an effort not to betray her presence.

When she looked again they had taken out their dice—every one of them.

"Your throw!"

"A four!"

"A five!"

"Shake 'em up!"

"'Tis you!"

"I'll have a try with none but my own," cried Mrs. Bagwell, digging down into her deep pocket.

Plainly no one trusted any one.

They were shoving, crowding, shifting places for luck, muttering, disputing as to numbers, wrangling, even calling for drinks as though in a tavern or worse.

Good God, what should she do?

Barbara Knepp and Beck Marshall were standing nose to nose in the middle of the room. One clutched a snuffbox claimed by the other. Suddenly they started running around the table crying out for help, threatening to scratch each other's eyes out.

Now or never!

Into view stepped Elizabeth Pepys, frilled and ruffled, puffed and laced, her head diamond powdered, a sparkling vision in azure satin. Down the stairs she came—her knees knocking together like to break under her; her heart leaping to her throat and that so parched and dry that it seemed never would she find her voice behind it. Trembling like

the aspen to which she had heard any wife (in disgrace) likened by numberless husbands, she came slowly down, step by step, into the very net of her enemies. The tumult ceased. Something within her bounded to life.

"Ah, ladies—" she began. To her encouragement her voice came out clear.—"Ladies!" With native tact she dwelt upon the word. "Welcome—delighted to see you, welcome all! Indeed it was good of you to come."

They were speechless in their bewilderment and she exultant because of it, catching the eye of Mercer who, for the first time in her life, was unstinting in her glances of admiration. No time to glory in that! No time for a moment's dallying—no time for aught but the business in hand!

With a great air she gave orders for wine and fruit and sweetmeats. She singled out first one and then another of her amazed, indignant, uneasy guests, greeting them handsomely, ignoring their frowns and their mutterings, overwhelming them with apologies for her tardiness, declaring she had been in her chamber and had only just been warned as to their coming.

She smiled at Knepp without a hint of reproach or a sneer or a question even. Her look was so gracious that it seemed merely to say—"You and I, we understand."

"Ah, and Nell Gwyn whom I have so admired—"

There was something in this one's eyes and also

that overheard exclamation of hers.—She paused and took her hand.

"Once—do you remember—I spoke to you—with my husband—do you remember?"

Nell had told the truth when she said she thought her sweet. She thought so now.

"You kissed me, madam," she cried impulsively. "Heaven's my witness I've loved you ever since!"

A friend among them! It gave a boost to her courage.

She turned gaily from one to the other, all grace and charm, all amiability; dispensing compliments, filling goblets, calling them by name; acknowledging to each her sway over Samuel Pepys, archly, graciously, frankly,—she the wife admitting it.

"And Mrs. Pierce—la belle Pierce! And Mrs. Bagwell—sweet puritan," she murmured. "And dark-haired Betty Michell—and Mrs. Allen the devoted wife of Lieutenant Jewkes."

Then with an almost childlike trust, certainly a something unfathomable to this present company, something that surely seemed to them stupid, she observed complacently:—

"Dear Mrs. Knepp—your 'Dapper Dicky's' away. I must serve you instead;—cake, madam?"

Knepp was taken aback, but only for a moment. Helping herself generously she observed in her deepest contralto: "Some rise by sin and some by virtue fall!"

This with a wink at Gwyn who straightway low-

ered her eyes and gave back, with an inimitable show of timidity: "My pride fell with my fortunes."

They applauded each other as vociferously as though the phrases were of their own invention.

If it hadn't been for Bagwell, suspicious and unsure, taking refuge behind indignation, demanding an explanation, it seemed almost as though the day might end in merriment. But she wasn't to be put off.

"What's it mean?" she cried. "We've a right to know!"

Her hostess met her more than half way. She assured her that presently she should be quite satisfied, she only begged her to have patience and meanwhile to be merry.

"Fill your glasses—fill up—fill up!"

Over and over again, the phrase so familiar in that room! Never was hostess more insistent. She kept them at it until, finally, when they were none the better nor wiser for it, she raised her own glass high above her head.

"Now then a toast—first to the absent one!"

When the din of exclamations had died Mrs. Pepys said, pleading most prettily:

"You'll not refuse the toast?"

Nell Gwyn said afterwards she made note of her manner for future use. She watched her, with her head on one side, in open admiration.

"Drink—drink—" implored their hostess, her-

self going about among them with the silver tankard—Samuel's latest purchase.

Presently she threw discretion to the winds. "A toast to Dapper Dicky, who loves his pretty wench! To Sammykins, who calls her his little black girl! A toast from his God-fearing Valentine; and one from the pretty 'Change woman; and one from the devoted wife—the little mother— Drink, ladies—drink!"

The only guest in that crowd too indignant to avail herself even of the food was Bagwell. Her digestion was poor—every one knew that. She held herself aloof while the rest of the brave company giggled and gorged. Whatever the climax, they had a philosophy to back them up—"Take all you can get when you can get it!" Many's the time in and out of their mysterious professions that they had had to make the best of a bad deal.

Mrs. Pepys looked over her glass at Nell: "Give me a toast!" she cried.

"Mercy on us, madam," said Nell with her mouth full of sugared cake, "your man's naught to me, nor never was. I'm climbing higher nor him. Beck Marshall will tell you that; Beck Marshall there beside you, her that's the praying parson's daughter. You can keep what you've got for all of me—I'm not one for a home man—keep your Sammy boy."

"If I can," said Elizabeth Pepys earnestly. And then, of all things in the world, she turned to her guests with a wide embracing gesture and said in a

whisper, as though confiding in each one—"I count on you—and you—and you."

By this time there seemed to be no doubt in their minds that their hostess was quite mad. Poor creature—poor soul—poor wretch! Samuel was a devil to be dealt with later. They were a vulgar lot, but after all—

They groped for their manners.

"The wine is delicious," said one.

"The cake's well made,—exceeding tasty."

"A noble tart!"

With a condescending chorus of commendation they started to take their leave.

But the foolish simple creature evidently had something up her sleeve. She threw back the long lock of hair that had strayed over her shoulder, and suddenly there crept into her voice a raucous mocking note that brought them all to a standstill.

"Delicious, eh? Delicious! And the cake's tasty; and the oranges well selected! I'm a good housewife, eh?—the best in London town! He says so too. Sometimes a bit careless but on the whole saving and looking to his interest—not extravagant. A woman for the home man, while you all serve another side of him—yes, all of you!"

She changed her tone and nodded at them gravely. They might have thought her envious;—certainly she was pathetic—and most puzzling. Perhaps it was there her fascination;—she seemed to hold them.

"I forgive you all because I must!" she exclaimed suddenly. "You're seven too many for me!"

So strange a mixture of humour and sadness in all she said! It was hard to get at just what she meant.

"I asked you here to-day in the absence of your friend—such a good friend to so many!" (What did she mean by that, for instance?)

"A favour to ask of you," she went on, "as woman to woman—seven women to one!"

It would have been a heart of ice that didn't feel sorry for her now!

"Give me your advice," she begged. "I'd like to keep my husband to myself, for myself; tell me how—you—you—you—you that have taken him from me?—I want to know how you did it!"

Was she mocking them? Did she mean it? Could she be serious?

"Brown eyes," she went on, "how did you come at him?"

Bah! The woman's a fool! Through the room there went a loud murmur.

"Red lips, tell me? Hair of gold, just a hint! And you of the lovely hands, and you of the swan-like neck!—Dumb? What—you won't?"

Swan-like neck, hair of gold, lovely hands—not so bad!

Marshall—Knepp—Betty sunned themselves in

her appreciation. The woman was a fool, without doubt, but an amiable fool.

Was she? Suddenly she had them all by the ears—an accusing angel, a jealous wife, an ugly enemy. She was all three.

"You who wear his ring on your left finger—you whose bosom heaves under his lace! You with his snuffbox—"

Open war now and the room in a turmoil! Just what she wanted had come about.—Vituperations being hurled from one to the other. Knepp berating Marshall; Betty glaring at Bagwell; Bagwell—fearful, indignant; Nell, glowing—giggling.—

The ringing voice of their hostess went on and on.

"We're all in the same boat—mine rocks and steadies;—yours rocks and rocks—and soon will topple over with too many passengers. Oh, I know—I know—Rebecca and Betty and Barbara and Ann! A new one here and another there—the boat rocks and rocks!"

Knepp was the first to recover. She dragged her arm away from Marshall, took a pinch of scented snuff and muttering, "I'll swear never did I hear aught more stupid!" started a general exodus.

They were all at the door, blocking it, all trying to disappear at the same moment, when they were once again made uncomfortably aware of their hostess. She had her serving woman by the arm and, in most strange and unaccustomed fashion, was presenting her as though she were an equal:

"The last—the last to rock the boat! Ladies—your latest rival! A cookmaid! The beads round her neck, her skirt of silk—presents from Samuel Pepys Esquire! Our cook, ladies—from Deptford—our cook!"

The scene was at an end and with it her bravado. Limp and trembling she faced the consequences.

Now that she had done it, what? And why? To what end?

When Samuel knew! These women—cats every one of them—what would they tell him? What wouldn't they? With turns and twists to their advantage!

Why had she done it? Why?

For the same reason that she had once crept to his bedside at midnight menacing him with red hot tongs. For the same reason that she had followed him muttering, half-dressed, into the garden. For the same reason that she had started up in the moonlight giving forth expressions of affright and madness, as one frantic. For the same reason that her wench below stairs over her wash, had suddenly with a great cry gone into a fit of direct raving. And when all came to all it was but a fit of jealousy about her Tom. Samuel had explained this.

"Tom with whom she is in love," said he, "while he is cold to it!"

A man in the case! And the girl's name was not Judy, but Jane, in the year 1669.

Not once in a lifetime has there happened to a woman what happened now to Mrs. Samuel Pepys. At the sound of a swishing skirt she turned and faced Nell Gwyn.

"I couldn't leave—you was too magnificent—I couldn't help but stop to say it."

Soothing words in the ears of a woman near frantic with apprehension!

"Laa, madam, that was a play indeed. If only them that writes for the stage had been here! So natural—life itself! How did you think on it? Gadzooks, but you had them—one and all. I could crack my sides with laughing." She bent her lithe young body backwards and forwards, breathless with mirth, only recovering to give expression to more and more delight.

"Of all the women in London, it's you that's most wonderful, and Samuel Pepys that don't know it! He'll know it now—he'll rue it!"

She chuckled and gurgled and went over the scene in detail, recounting it for all and more than it was worth, picking out the high spots;—Bagwell the puritan behind her fan; Beck Marshall and Barbara Knepp coming to blows over the snuffbox; the cook-maid not knowing if it was a compliment she was receiving or an insult.

"And so you're not one that cares for my husband?" asked Elizabeth Pepys in the first pause.

"Not me—I've other fish in the pan worth the frying."

"A great man, my husband!"

"I never yet divided no man, however great, nor never will unless it be the King!"

This young thing standing there, the natural crimson bursting through the paint that covered her cheeks, a merry smile on the curve of her lips, sun in the blue of her eyes—the whites of them as clear as a child's—was saying: "If I've a mind, madam, I've made it up to go from height to height. I'll stop not till I'm at the top. Off the shoulders of one we step to another. This one to-day and that one to-morrow. But always careful to climb a bit higher!"

Eager for more Elizabeth gasped out—"Go on—go on! I must know all."

Nell Gwyn the consultant—Nell with a philosophy hatched in the house of a certain Madam Ross and climaxed in the green room of the King's Theatre! She was in her element now.

"Lord, you mustn't really hold to them—who does?"

"But if—aren't you never afraid?"

"Laa, there's plenty of fish in the sea," she said at last in the tone of one who would recommend it as a never ending comfort.

"Do you believe Samuel Pepys Esquire is the only man?"

For the moment his wife left that unanswered.

"When we were first married," she said timidly, "there was one who gave me dancing lessons, a comely black man, and I danced rather well—with grace."

Nell looked at her appraisingly and granted her that.

"Samuel used to like to watch me till all of a sudden he grew jealous."

"Good, then you had him!"

"Had him? No, I was afraid I'd lose him, terribly, frightfully afraid."

"Lose him and him jealous?"

Elizabeth described him stealing home early and going up to his room to listen if she was dancing.

"I durst swear you wasn't," Nell broke in full of appreciation; "not you! Jealous—'tis a chain round a man's neck."

"Indeed, indeed I was always dancing," protested Elizabeth earnestly. "But sometimes when he, the dancing master, put his arm around me to show me—"

"Faith, I know!"

"Nay, nay, you don't know. I wouldn't let him. But all the same Samuel—my husband was jealous—and so I renounced him."

"Samuel?"

"No, no, the dancing master."

"Renounced him? And what does that mean?"

There were certain words not in the vocabulary

of Nell Gwyn. This was one. Her hostess was put to it to explain. Nell gave a deprecatory little grin and then cried: "Stop my breath if ever I gave up anything for a man except for something! What did he give up?"

"Nothing, but I think—"

"Laa, madam, I never think—it wrinkles the brow and draws down the mouth."

"Things grew worse, Samuel was harsh with me, finding fault. I used to write him little notes."

"To your lover?" Nell was getting more and more mixed.

"No, to Samuel—on the disagreeables of my life. He tore them to bits before my eyes, burned them. He was afraid some one might see them. He said they would make him ridiculous."

"I'm not much for the writing game," said Nell slowly. Then with a chuckle she went back to the scene with the cookmaid.

" 'Tis she that has driven me to what I've done," cried Mrs. Pepys. "I saw—I saw—"

No need to tell what she saw. Nell knew to the last gasp!

"Yes, 'tis seeing that does the mischief," said she ruefully. "Lord Brockhurst threw me out because of what he saw. Actor Hart I left. Clem and the Duke—mm—and Hancock and all the others. I gave 'em cause. And—let me see—there's Jim of County Trent, and Will—whatever was his name? Laa, my memory fails! I never was good at names.

And now I look to the Court. Why not? Lord help us, we can't keep a man unless we get another. 'Tis the law!"

Out of it all these words beat upon the brain of her listener.—"We can't keep a man unless we get another!" Samuel of all men!

"This dancing man—send for him!"

"Oh, no, no."

"Who else then? Who can you get, eh?"

Together they went over her tiny list.

"There's Mr. Somersett I knew in France, young—good looking—rich."

"Sounds good!"

"And Mr. Hales, him that did my portrait."

"John Hales!" Nell knew him.

"You must carry on," said she presently, "else what you've done is naught. But go easy, get your man ready. Don't throw one over till you've got another in the closet. Hales may be your man—we'll see."

She held out her paint box.

"Samuel hates paint," said his wife, waving it aside.

"So let him see it on you! Here's a patch for you."

"Oh, no—Samuel—"

Samuel—Samuel—Gad, he was the woman's life! Perhaps she had the capacity to be on with two at one and the same time. That might be! She herself—Nell smiled.

"If ever he was at your feet he'll be there now."

"At my feet!" cried Mrs. Pepys with a momentary glimmer of enthusiasm. Then: "He's been there a thousand times. We've been married years upon years—but he always gets up!"

Nell looked at her curiously. Married years upon years and still eager for him!

"I'll tell him of men that favour me," she observed presently.

"Tell him?" Truly one couldn't fathom this poor pretty lady. "And have them!" said Nell, arching her brows.

"I'll write down their names—I will." This positively and bravely. "'Tis part of my plan—'twill anger him the most of all,—but do it I will!"

"Write?"

"Ay, ay, that I will—I vow I will!"

"I'd sooner let him see them in the life," said Nell positively—"I would."

"Ah, you're young," exclaimed Mrs. Pepys, "younger than me!"

There was a flash of the past in Nell's eyes and a glimpse of the present, as she said with the radiant reassuring smile of one claiming a point: "There's no record of when I came in."

How pretty she was with her laughing mouth, her small, uptilted nose, her glory of reddish hair. The wretchedness of her life loomed up before the honest eyes of her hostess.

"I'm down in Samuel's book—all our dates are

there—our marriage day, my birthday—" The words seemed to break through a sigh.

"The first I knew I was at the madam's filling strong waters to the gentlemen," Nell dropped casually.

"You poor soul," breathed Mrs. Pepys.

Nell must have failed to catch the full measure of her tone. Her eyes roamed over the crowded room, the stuffy books, the music stand, the harpsichord, back to the pretty lady—one man, the same one, breakfast, dinner, supper—

"And you, poor soul," she echoed. "Ah, i' faith, 'tis true, 'tis pity." She smiled under her big brim, and added, as though she had quoted the author quite as he intended, yet with an air of one disclaiming all responsibility—"Mr. Shakespeare."

"I know—I know," said Mrs. Pepys, helping her out, pleased that she could remember—" 'And pity 'tis, 'tis true.' "

"Lud, if only you was not a lady born!" Nell burst out with unexpected vehemence.

To which of all things Mrs. Pepys murmured: "Alack the day!"

And then over a mighty chasm their lips met as though they had breached it at last.

CHAPTER XI

MARVELLOUS the way Samuel could write pages upon pages without so much as a pause. His wife couldn't help admiring him when she tried her hand at matching him.

Scratch—scratch—scratch—blot! Lord, sheet after sheet ruined! Quill nibs broken, pressure too hard or not hard enough. Ink on her fingers—a smear on her dress. And no place to write but at his very desk! And him expected home now any hour! She never did have a desk of her own. Everything she had laid hands on was disarranged, and even her face was smudged with ink. She transported a full horn carefully into her own closet and followed with paper, quills and sand.

If only she had paid more attention in the days when he was for ever teaching her!

Slips of paper—sheets half covered—a sentence here, a sentence there—how she worked! It would have been easier to write in the French tongue. Her head ached, her back felt nigh to breaking, her fingers were all cramped. Mercer never before in all her life was called on to assist in the spelling of so many words. This fever of writing was interlarded with moments of indecision and doubt.

Cross as the devil she was one minute, the next tearful, timid, full of misgivings.

When her hands were all of a tremble and still more or less stained with dark splotches, and her brain in a turmoil with a jumble of words, memories of what she had made out of his writings and what she had set down of her own, he burst in upon her. Straight from Colebrook, through the streets of London, to the arms of his wife!

Thanks be to the Lord that she was not at her writing when he came in laden with kisses, so content to be home, never loitering a second longer than he needed—leaving Hewer to attend to things at the office. Samuel at his best—an approving, amiable, happy, loquacious, entertaining Samuel. Full of his trip from Bath to Oxford, from Bristol to Philips Norton, to Cambridge, to Hereford, to Brampton. Adventures and gossip, descriptions and experiences. He was eloquent for her entertainment.

At first she could scarcely listen. What would he say when he knew? Evidently he had heard nothing, seen no one, suspected nothing. And not a reproach did he make to her. Not a question, so far, as to what she had done in his absence, not a single nasty remark.

He gave her gossip of his family, the kind she loved. His sister was too lean and pert, ill humoured and ugly. His father, whom she could never bear, growing old, mighty infirm. His

brother, incapable and unable to make a living—details of a very dull household.

Of course Pauline was too lean, worse than being too fat—shrivelled and wrinkled. No wonder he contemplated his wife with flattering eyes. So long as he was in this mood there was no hurry to be at outs with him—no necessity to precipitate an unpleasant scene.

"A great place, Brampton," Samuel was saying, "to which some day we might retire."

She had no fear of it. Samuel deserting London! She smiled at the idea—smiled her prettiest.

It was an invitation for him to lean over and kiss her again.

A nice pause.

He went on presently to describe a visit to Lady Mary Hinchingbroke. Comely, but not a beauty—yet the kind of lady he liked, sweet-tempered and well disposed, a lover of books and pictures, and of good understanding like his own wife. And her twin boys had recited for him in Latin and Greek. He was pleased at that. It was a compliment to his learning.

Was it possible he had ever even glanced at a servant of hers?

She liked the gossip about people rather better than descriptions of places. Still it was interesting to hear about the nasty dinners he had had and the discomfort of the beds he had slept in, and what

his layings out were, with the high price of strawberries and the low price of fish, and how he had missed her.

Another kiss! She began actually to question the evidence of her eyes! She must get at Nell Gwyn and see that she had attended to the silencing of Knepp and Marshall and Hughes. As for Bagwell —she could be easily frightened.

People, churches, tombstones, he had visited them all—Bishop Montague's tomb, and the tomb of the famous twins whose bodies were at their birth joined together. Dwelling on the awful fate of the one who outlived the other his voice became tender, loving.

He described a walk round the walls of Bath; the sights at Abbey Church—how men were brought in in litters and set down in the chancel; and of his listening to a poor sermon and sleeping through most of it. And then the details of his bath—a glorious sweat he had! Afterwards to Cambridge, and into the town past Jesus College where he drank his bellyful of beer, the best he ever drank; and visited the place where he used to buy stewed prunes; and walked down the old walk; and sat where he used to sit and dream of love—enduring love.

Another nice pause, fervently punctuated.

His youth!—Before there was any Knepp or Marshall—

Samuel young, sanguine, joyous! Samuel fresh

from college, full of intention to conquer the world! Samuel twenty-two, in love!

All over again, she the one woman!

What could she do but let him kiss her, and pray Heaven that he would find nothing amiss that night?

Betimes the next morning she would steal down and remove her papers—mayhap even destroy them—some of them.

In due time she could depend upon Will Hewer to give him a proper hint as to his future behaviour. She was sure of that, and when she complained sufficiently doubtless he himself would discharge the troublesome wench with a fitting admonition. Perhaps she had exaggerated the girl's forwardness and his attentions; no doubt she was but a pastime, something for the moment; perhaps—and perhaps—

As for his journal—mm—she'd see to that; as for hers—

Time enough in the morning; she'd sleep over it and then remove the pages to some safe hiding place.

So to supper and to prayers and to bed, determined to put off her mind's trouble till morning.

She took down her curls, unpinned her puffs, unlaced her stays— Oh, the blessed relief!

Scratching, rubbing, she wondered vaguely if all women, the Queen and Lady Sandwich—

Perhaps they went less tight. She measured

eighteen inches in the old bodice, sixteen in the new. Mercer had indeed a strong hand. Phew!

One glimpse of Samuel's face was sufficient!

She had overslept, lain too long, while he had risen betimes, unable to sleep, restless after too much supper, a fine lobster cooked to his liking.

Other revealing things there were besides, if any were needed. Her work basket overturned; bits of crumpled paper on the floor amid silks and cottons; a book thrown from the table; the window standing open—plainly he needed air.

He glanced at her disapprovingly. She had, in memory of Nell, placed a patch, a tiny one, at the side of her mouth; and a slight, just a suspicion of colour, on her cheeks, high near the eyes.

He began gently, as though determined to hold himself in control, in a tone loaded with pretence of friendliness:

"Since my going abroad, wife, you've been lonely, eh? At Woolwich I thought of it; bereft of a husband a woman must go slow. I hastened back yesterday instead of to-morrow as I had planned. A woman cannot be too careful."

Mm—he must have found the sheet on which she had written, "I talked to- . . . as to my husband's going abroad, and remaining till Saturday—" Mm—that one—too bad! If he had had to find any she wished with all her heart it had been the one on which she had been at such pains to spell

out: "My husband still in a melancholy, fusty humour, as sometimes he is when all women pass him by—"

Or that other nice one:

"Samuel this day bought me a cabinet of walnut tree, a present most pleasing to himself, wherein he keeps his papers."

"Monday saw me off," he went on suavely. "What did you then on Monday?"

"Monday? Monday?" Exasperatingly dreamy her tone as she answered: "In the morning I went down the Lane and out to the 'Change, and there met a motley crowd that jostled me back and forth, in and out."

Recapitulation gave incentive to renewed anger.

"What a pretty shop is that of Mistress Harper!" she cried suddenly. "Such fine laces she showed me, and the new striped silks for petticoats."

The remark passed him by. Whom had she met? He dwelt on that over and over, catechising in a way she hated.

"For one, Mr. Somersett. Lud, it was good to speak again French; he speaks it well and such fine speeches he makes! Ay, and such pretty compliments he pays—compliments to my eyes—*'A vos beaux yeux!'* And his manner so fine! *'Madame, je vous admire!'*"

An explosion was due— Ah!

"Zounds, madam, when I go abroad again you go with me!" he shouted at her.

Would she? Faith, she'd see. Meanwhile she was in her most tantalising mood.

"The Earl of Sandwich was more polite than ever he has been, seeing I was alone; and Mr. Talbot spake me fair; and Mr. Hales. When I says: 'My portrait pleases,' he made answer: 'Madam, I love to paint you!'"

Samuel had turned his back but it expressed as much to her, who knew every line of it, as his face, now as red as the lobster that he had partaken of so freely at supper the night before. Lud, he was in a rage! He stood at the sideboard pouring himself out a drink, gulping it down, muttering between his swallows. All leading up to the ugliest sort of a scene—one that she really hadn't counted on—one that she didn't know how to meet—violent—full of insinuation.

"You called him 'Mr. Hales'?"

Viciously Samuel accented the "Mr." She remained silent.

"His name is John—did'st ever call him John?"

Torn between a tremor of fear and a desire to laugh she took refuge in this: "Samuel, you seem in such a fusty humour—a body has scarce time to make reply."

"I am—I am—! Zounds, madam, I'll not have it! This I find hid in a book!"

He took from his pocket a handful of crumpled sheets. "And this in your work basket! My household matters for the world to laugh at! I

have read things here this day, madam, that mean I have the right to turn you from my house!"

At least she still had the power to disturb him, that was something!

"And these pages have no sense," he cried, crushing them in his hands.

"Laa, as to matters literary I was never apt," she murmured.

"And to have them spread abroad to make me ridiculous!"

"You, Samuel?"

"I—Samuel! And this I found hid in a corner!"

He brought out another crumpled scrap and shook it in her face.

"Hidden papers—what is this you've writ?"

"Private matters, Samuel—my journal."

The rest was lost in an outburst so violent that she decided he was giving vent to his temper to frighten her. He started swearing, and then praying to God to forgive him, for he had murder in his heart. He kicked her work basket (a new one) to the end of the room, and cried: "There—put that in your journal! I'll break every bone in his body!"

"His—whose?" she managed to falter out.

"And what spelling! 'He tuke my hand.' And then follows the letter J—. You write so bad I most took it for a G!— J—J—J—on this bit of paper; and here, madam—here!"

The one she thought she had torn up! How could she have been so careless? Thinking of John

Hales she must have scribbled his name! Good Lord, she had neglected to destroy it!

"J? J?—Laa, Samuel, it's absurd!"

"And this S?"

"Samuel of course—S for Samuel." She breathed more freely.

"'I observe it more convenient to have him gone,'" he roared out. He had picked up his magnifying glass and was turning pages over, spreading out the rumpled fragments.

"Gad, madam, I'll know the man! J—I'll have his life! John Hales it is!"

Her heart bounding, beating against the side of her body, gave her a feeling of nausea. To bring John Hales into it would never do—not now—not yet! Surely not while the painter himself was uninformed!

Samuel went striding up and down the room.

"John Hales! To prefer him to Samuel Pepys! A portrait painter, a dauber of colours, a limner!" (So that was it!) "I'll run him through, I swear I will. This day I'll to his studio!"

Hurling threats and curses, his morning gown flying out behind him, he went thundering down the room and up the stairs.

Finding herself alone she felt for some reason suddenly completely humiliated, just as though she were all in the wrong!

"H'sh—he can hear every word you say."

With a warning look Hewer tiptoed over to her.

"You think he means it about John Hales?"

"He loves you, madam."

Ah! If she thought that!

Nell Gwyn's instructions went by the board. She was actually wringing her hands.

"I should have writ less clear! John Hales! To mislay that one! They must not meet! I must prevent it for more reasons than one. I sought to make Samuel jealous, but he goes too far. I sought to make him only so far jealous that he would compromise with me—give up for my sake—bargain—I to have this—him that. Lud, whatever shall I do?"

"He loves you, madam,—in his heart he loves you."

That was good to hear, but all the same he must not seek out John Hales. She had a sense of humour, but none came to her aid now. She could only see disaster ahead for herself, even perhaps ridicule. "Go easy—you must have a man in the closet." And she had not even seen John Hales! She had spent her time writing!

"He must not seek out the painter. Then would I be undone indeed—whatever must I do?"

With every inflection that he could command Hewer pleaded loyally for the master.

"Do but compromise," he whispered.

"With dignity," said she at last.

"Send for him—go to him—"

At the end it always came to that; she sighed heavily.

It had been an exciting morning, she felt as though she had been beaten, sore at heart, sore in body.

"To pacify him I'll do over my hair in simple fashion and shift myself into the gown he likes, thus to show him I yield to his taste at least. But I'll not burn my words. I'll give a point and take a point. I'll comfort him as to John Hales, but he must give in too—the baggage must go!"

She dragged herself wearily up the stairs, wearily into her room. She waited listening till she heard Samuel leave his.

She could hear Hewer's voice—dear Will trying as ever to make things easier for her, trying to smooth her path down the stairs. Of course, she'd have to go down. That was the devilish part of it. Going up was easy enough, stamping out of the room, banging her door, standing up to him—easy—easy; her impertinent retorts, easy—all easy. But the crawling back—no matter how it was accomplished—was bound to be bitter.

She indulged in a moment when she swore she would not go back, indulged in it as though she meant it, and glanced in the mirror to see how she looked defiant. Oh, Lord! If she didn't go back—what? Neither she nor her family had a cent.

After all it was only fair to give him credit for his generosity. Indeed that very week with his consent she had given her mother a gown, and Balty, her brother, money.

She looked about her closet noting its luxurious damask draperies (counterfeit to be sure—not all silk, but effective); the warming pan of silver that he had presented her with when she was last ill; the alabaster St. George that she had coveted and so acquired; her carved cabinet with all its roomy nooks and corners; her gilt candelabra and noble quantity of candles; her pretty pious pictures, her luxurious canopied bed and soft Turkey rug.

With a damp finger she attacked the dab of crimson paint on her cheeks, and removed her single tiny patch. She changed her slippers to the buckled ones that he had given her; she brushed every trace of powder out of her hair and did it over in the simple fashion he always liked. She put on a flowing skirt of ripe plum colour—the seams of which she herself had traced with gold under Samuel's approving eyes. Her shoulders and bust gleamed through her most transparent India muslin kerchief—alluring to the eye! In case they should go later to a play she'd cover it with her short cape of lilac silk—all ruffles—and she'd wear her yellow bird's-eye hood.

She opened her closet door and emerged smiling tremulously, the wife of Samuel Pepys Esquire,—

the woman who always, in the end, went more than half way to meet him.

Silence down stairs. Evidently Hewer had gone.

She stood very still gathering up her courage—a corner of her mind going backward, another corner forward.

Backward to what she had done since he left, to the women she had summoned, to Nell Gwyn's advice through her curving apricot lips.

Forward to reconciliation—forgiveness.

The wife of Samuel Pepys came slowly down, noiselessly, timidly, step by step.

Voices—

She pushed open a door and paused just long enough to give a strangled cry—to let them know—the wench from Deptford and her husband—that she had seen—

And then, behind her, the door slammed.

Flying down the stairs she went, her ears tingling with the commotion she had left behind her—Will Hewer mounting two steps at a time, Mercer wringing her hands—Deb crying, Samuel roaring—

CHAPTER XII

JOHN HALES was in his studio when Mrs. Pepys bursting in found him tête-à-tête (the French is hers) with the youthful daughter of Lord Hawley.

There was no doubt as to that. As to the rest, making due allowance for the enthusiasm of a seventeenth-century flapper, for the exaggerations of a Nell Gwyn who would be a heroine or die, for the reticence of a Will Hewer, for the foul suspicions of a Talbot and a Somersett, and knowing that Hales could lie like a gentleman, and doubtless did—the scenes pieced themselves out bit by bit, and took shape in the mind of Mrs. Pepys somewhat as follows:

Never dreaming what was ultimately in store for him, John Hales sat chatting with Talbot and Somersett a trifle uneasily, for he wanted them to be gone before the little Lady Lucinda arrived. He had already told them she was to have a sitting for the hand. It was plain to be seen they did not believe his anxiety to be rid of them was on her account, though he had averred it several times. Well then, the devil take them, he'd get rid of them anyway! He moved to the door, looked out at

the window, a low one facing on to a garden, shuffled his pictures and disappeared into the anteroom.

"Before you go I'll show you the Lady Lucinda's portrait," he called out.

"Before we go!" They drew close together, eyebrows lifted, shoulders shrugged. "He expects some one, no doubt of it."

They agreed it was not she whose portrait he would show them—sly devil! Quickly then Talbot resorted to a manœuvre so familiar that it required neither thought nor imagination. He waved his whip in the air and brought it down noiselessly on a distant chair. Approaching Somersett on the tips of his toes he whispered: "Trust me to find out! If there's nothing in it I have but wasted a bit of my time. They do say he is as good as matched to the Lady Lucinda— H'sh—"

When Hales returned with the portrait his guests lavished unstinted praise on the sitter and artist. Her beauty, his skill, the pose he had placed her in —graceful—entrancing—innocent!

Somersett burst into a disagreeable laugh.

"The word 'innocent' strikes strangely on the ear of one but lately from France," he said with no attempt at apology.

"There's no such word in England unless it be used for an infant in arms," said Talbot.

Hales exclaimed somewhat indignantly that the Lady Lucinda was not sixteen.

"Sixteen to-day is as knowing as sixty twenty years ago!"

"I am not one that credits all that nonsense as to the young," cried Hales; "plenty are innocent. She's but a child. At all events, innocent or not, she'll be here with her duenna."

"And then,"—said Talbot, rehearsing the scene for Nell Gwyn in an effort to pick up a spicy bit where he could, to piece out his own meagre tale, which from unforseen circumstances came out sadly lacking—"then we said things back and forth—such talk as women never hear—no, not even in their tiring rooms, truths of men—matters they ne'er suspicion."

So they came to a mention of Pepys—his amours.

"Cookmaids and worse—things beyond the comprehension of any wife," said Talbot.

Nell nodded and nodded. She swore to Mrs. Pepys when retailing it, more or less accurately, she thought her head would come off with nodding, especially when he said:

"There's real innocence for you—a faithful submissive handsome wife as ever was!"

In the studio there was no dispute as to that.

"She suspects nothing—nothing."

Nell delighted in this scene. Talbot booted and spurred, strutting about in a crimson coat and bottle-green riding trousers, playing with his fringed gloves now that he had relinquished his whip; Somersett equipped "to the nines" in high heels,

beribboned peruke, short breeches fringed in points over hose of pale pink—

"Flesh-coloured, my dear Lady," said Nell with gusto. "And one of those hats feathered all around the high crown, his long rapier hanging from a broad embroidered belt—a gorgeous figure of a man!"

John Hales, their uneasy host, was buttoned up into a tight cinnamon-coloured coat.

"Not like Peter Lely in one of those loose working sacks," said Nell, "he being expectant of a special visitor!"

Denials burst from Elizabeth Pepys, and a reassuring grin from Nell as she went back to the phrase: "The wife suspects nothing—nothing."

She repeated it with rare enjoyment in Talbot's positive tone as one laying down the law; with French accent, in Somersett's manner, giving the most unimportant words a most important accent; then sadly, hopelessly echoing the despairing painter man:

"Nothing—she knows nothing—poor lady! Poor innocent lady!"

Adventure and intrigue! Nell was in her element.

Her narrative took colour from her audience. To Mrs. Pepys she described herself crouching unseen in the damp garden, peering over the low gate that led to the studio steps at the side, a patient

Griselda, discretion personified. Discarding her cartwheel hat for a demure hood which made her even more conspicuous, she stood watching, waiting. Nell Gwyn waiting in the service of another, and that one of her own sex! A new rôle of her own casting.

"Unobserved I approached," said she, "on the tips of me toes, and stood till the voices went out at the door. A pox on the pair of them! Then I made free with the painter man's entrance, there being no one to keep me out."—And encountered what must have been one of the surprises of her young life—an indifferent reception!

"For all he's your lover," said she, disregarding a volley of denials from Mrs. Pepys, "he's dull—dull."

She mimicked Hales to the life, bidding her come in in a tone that said: "Drat the woman, may the devil take her and keep her!"

. A man and a painter—(think on't)—she that had Lely and Kneller grateful for every inch of her, from the soles of her feet to the last hair of the head on her neck!— "Unwilling to leave aught hid from the eyes of man," said she proudly with the air of an empress condescending to one less fortunate.

His invitation lacked what she called the pressing note, but, God be praised, she wasn't sensitive.

"When I'm after something the devil himself must stand aside," said she. "Now the point was

to keep my foot in where I'd placed it! I became a bit confiding as to one thing and another as I am with Sir Peter—as one must be with all men. At the name the young man found his tongue. I'll say that for him. Up and down and in and out he praised him, saying he'd be living when all the rest of us was dead and gone, and much of the value of the portrait would be for them that come after, and that they'd know my looks to the life."

And so on and so on, mixed with all the jargon of the studio—atmosphere, masses, middle distance, colour scheme, brush work.—

To Mrs. Pepys she said gravely: "I' faith I joined in. Why not? Sir Peter (May he live forever!) is doing me in heavenly fashion! Lord bless us, what can't one that knows do with paint! For my locks, that may be some too red and skimp, he's endowing me with luscious gold ones that fall to the waist! And my nose, being of a snub, he's making it straight with the Roman attributes! And as for my figure—not a hint of plumpness except where plumpness belongs, on the hips and other unmentionables!"

She delivered this with the indescribable wink, the irrepressible, contagious smile that at that period were as well known as the length of her smocks and the pattern of lace on her pantalets.

In her peregrinations about the young man's studio she pulled up at the portrait on his easel.

"Fair appearing," said she, "but they're all fair in their portraits—the languishing eyes, pouting lips, curved brows, long ringlets—theirs to command."

John Hales was off at that, protesting till she silenced him with the flattery of comparison.

"You and Sir Peter—you're all alike," said she, "in all the Court there's not one but is a beauty when she smiles from the canvas, but, faith, in life they're a sorry lot. I've seen 'em. Who's this one?"

"An infant," said he, "a maid in her 'teens."

She stood looking at the Lady Lucinda, and then the light broke.

"S'death and faith, but I have it now," she cried. "The encounter—a fair innocent and Nell Gwyn. Oh, Gimini! but he's afraid he'll be compromised!"

With that she decided he'd do with a bit of taking down, and so pretended to reassure him.

"Laa," said she, "lives there a man or woman that doesn't know a dauber of paints is not for me!"

Giggling, teasing, shrugging, nodding, blinking, she protested she was well beyond that—there on quite another errand.

The way she tilted her chin—the way she raised her full upper lip, the manner of her gesture, what she said and how she said it—"Gwyniticisms" her admirers called them. They quoted her in and out the taverns, and toasted her, and tried to describe

the indescribable. They spouted Caledon's portrait of "Florimel,"—swearing it was Nell to the life.

"A turned-up nose that gives an air, a full nether lip, an out mouth, the bottom of the cheeks a little blub, and two dimples that form at her smile."

So Dryden, and after him the multitude—and Samuel Pepys.

"Pretty, witty Nell!"

She returned to the portrait.

"Lord, if she's that innocent," said she, "if that speaks true she'll take me for a lady! Ay, me that was born in a coal yard and that started life a-crying 'Fresh herrings—ten a groat!'"

Up the studio she went like a gamin of the streets, and down she came with all the manner of a born aristocrat, a haughty, overbearing one at that.

All the actress to the front at last, she whispered mysteriously: "'Tis on the part of a lady I'm here now. A lovely lady, one that's enamoured of you—mad for you—pay heed and mark me—mad for you!"

"Some orange wench!"

"Plague on the man," cried Nell, "I said a lady, a true lady if ever there was one—the wife of one that neglects her damnably!"

Hales was wholly incredulous. "On account of you?"

"Lord save you if he doesn't damn you—nay—

nay. She's one that can't help herself—a lady. You've bewitched her."

Hales took her tone at this, half mocking, half serious, "Ah! the plot! Revenge, and I'm to be the villain. What trick has the husband played on you?"

Protest as she might, he couldn't conceive of her being there just to be doing some one a service—a lady in distress!

"Well then, have your way," said she; "her husband did speak ill of me saying I was not fit for a great part. Drat him!"

For some time yet they parried back and forth, she swearing him not to betray her, he assuring discretion on his oath. It was then she opened his eyes and made him sit up.

"Mrs. Pepys it is," she said quietly.

Mrs. Pepys in the mouth of Nell Gwyn!

"Ay, the wife of Samuel Pepys, the wife of him that did say I was no good in serious parts. But I hold him no grudge for that." A sudden thought flashed across her face. "And if I do here's my revenge—Mrs. Pepys that has been breeding love to thee—sous'd over head and heels—I swear it. What say you?"

"Pooh," he said at last, "I don't think him the best dish in London!"

Still incredulous he hemmed and hawed and stood and sat. "But his wife—his wife—a woman of wit and charm!"

The thought of her took him striding up the studio and back again.

"She's mortal tired of him—beyond words anxious to be rid of him," Nell threw out.

Incredible! Hales described how she had sat before him—pointing out her very seat. "Never did she give a hint of it! And when I touched her to move her head or her hand ne'er trembled or gave sign."

"A lady she—a lady," said Nell as simply as though she had been companioned by one all her life. And then she followed it with the only definition she knew: "As timid as a pigeon. She'd die with shame to have you know her thoughts; the passion that's within her is locked tight here."

No doubt under her breath she said again, "Heaven pity her," still endeavouring to imagine all a lady meant and present the picture plausibly.

Over and over Hales reiterated that he couldn't believe it.

Nell was gloating now. "A beauty, eh? A plague on the husband and the blessings of heaven on his sweet wife! Think of it! 'Tis for you to win her."

Gaining impetus from his bewilderment she grew more and more emphatic. "Let me blood if her heart be not more than half yours now!"

"The devil it is!"

"Ay, as Heaven's me witness!"

"But how came you on this?"

"How?" Nell seated herself, taking time to think the manner of it out as she spoke. "Where but in the Woman's Shift, where them that are husbands go to fondle and tittle tattle? There's plenty they leave behind them for such as us to pick up. Oh, we've time enough there for gossip and other things besides. The Woman's Shift is the place for it; 'tis a sight worth seeing."

He knew it. All the make believe of the world crowded in with the dirt of a lifetime. Wooden legs, lace ruffs, crowns and jewels, armour and petticoats, false limbs and real ones!

"'Tis a beautiful place," said Nell, reflecting the charm of it in her eyes. "Helps everything, from a muddy complexion to a bit of tinsel—so beautiful and bright they look!" Then with the air of confiding something of real import: "Samuel Pepys was there and left a trail of filthy gossip behind him."

Hales no longer concealed his pleasure. "And there's talk of us, Mrs. Pepys and me?"

"You should hear Barbara Knepp, his Bab; and Maggie Hughes that's hooked the prince. He's jealous, say they. And she, poor soul, she's dying for you to pay court to her. Gad, man alive, have you ever seen one more lovely than her?" She searched for a comparison and then, memory to the rescue, cried: "A delicious melon, pure and consenting—ripe and only awaiting the cutting up."

All very well but how to come at her?

"Her husband is always close at hand," Hales insisted.

"The deuce he is! He hasn't been to see Knepp or Hughes these three days past, that argues he's away."

Nell watched her steps carefully now, intimating that all her news had come from Knepp and Hughes.

"He's gallivanting and jaunting, taking his fill, glutting himself with looking at other women, while his lady mopes at home. Your time's to hand. Press your chance. Go to her with a nosegay in your hand, follow it with a precious jewel and a billet-doux. There's no way of wooing better than the written word. She likes writing—ay! And tempt her with a jewel or something she's no occasion for. I doubt she's had a real unnecessary present these many years, poor soul!"

Nell grew reminiscent, tears in her voice, longing in her eyes. Finally she ended with: "As Tom Hart says in the play, him that all of us women love—'She's beautiful and therefore to be wooed; she's a woman and therefore to be won,' or some such!"

At a noise in the anteroom, distinctly a rustle of skirts and a female voice, he jumped to his feet.

"Take heart," cried she, seeing the alarm on his face. "Do but give me a moment to recover and put myself in repair and I'll do you credit."

Presently through the anteroom with her woman in close attendance came the dear little Lady Lucinda.

"A sweet mouth," said Nell, picturing her later, "big candid eyes, not a line in her face, the voice of a child, high like this. Oh, and so innocent!—a study for such as me that might have some day to play her. 'My mamma— And so mamma—and dear mamma—' She was afraid she was intruding, and she had but stopped in to say that she couldn't sit this day—but if Mr. Hales would be so kind—

"Faith, I knew my business, I told her I was at that moment taking my departure. 'Me servants have gone before,' said I; 'me chair waits in the street below, me women I have on the instant dispatched.' 'Women,' said I—it was as easy to make it many as one! 'I was speaking to Mr. Hales of his portraits,' said I; 'delightful—delightful—speaking likenesses; he is a great painter, a rival of Sir Peter who is by way of doing me portrait!' I described it—nay, nay, not that one—t'other, all drapes with a lamb at me side! The child looked at me in a way to set me nerves a-jangling, her eyes growing bigger and bigger. Poor innocent! 'I've been admiring of you here,' said I, and in my embarrassment I blurted out:—'Stop me breath, if I don't mean it!' But I collected myself quickly. 'I would say 'tis perfection,' said I. Lord, then I was nervous and so was John Hales. 'I must be off!' said I. 'This day I've a jaunt to make into the

city and then back must I to Lady Jane's. Yes, the Lady Jane of Warwickshire is in town and I must help to housewarm her. And then on to a game of hazard, and I've a dance lesson, and a new set of puffs to fit, and eighteen visits to return.' I let fall a mention of church before I went. Then: 'Good day! Good day! The pleasure is mine' and so forth and so forth. 'I'll show myself out. What ho there, menials! Me chair! Your lady's chair!' So I went, she never having a suspicion as to who I was!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE little Lady Lucinda was still there when Mrs. Pepys arrived breathless—a picture none the less in that most ravishing hood, —the yellow bird's-eye one, vastly becoming and unusual.

The painter tried to hide his amazement and failed.

Literally dancing between the two women he murmured their names, declaring he was honoured, honoured because Mistress Pepys had come, honoured because Lady Lucinda was there, honoured because she was leaving—honoured—honoured—

"I am indeed," exclaimed the little lady unexpectedly finding a most disagreeable tongue, "with my companion!"

Mrs. Pepys realised that she had brought about what she called a *contre temps*. Also that the chit was reading her a lesson in propriety. The dear child, what should she know of life or suffering, guarded, surrounded by chaperons?

She became more and more perturbed, more and more apologetic. While the painter was begging the little lady to say when she'd come back for what he designated as the hand and arm, Mrs. Pepys was

blurting out excuses that seemed only to make matters worse.

"Laa, I quite forgot my woman—I was in that much of a scramble to be here—I thought it being thus early you might be alone— I had to see him," she said finally.

"See him all you please," cried the Lady Lucinda almost stamping her foot, "and stay till you're tired."

With that she flounced out of the room leaving behind her two most uncomfortable and utterly amazed people.

"Mercy on us, what have I done?" cried Mrs. Pepys. "I've heard talk of a match between you and I've driven her out!"

Hales was really at his wit's end. "Impossible to make out the ways of a girl," he exclaimed. "But a moment since she seemed pleased to think I was sought by a woman, and now the same sets her in a toss!"

Mrs. Pepys was sorry but she was so much sorrier about other things that were more important that she dismissed this one, observing loftily: "Don't worry—she'll come back—we always do."

What she had to say was most embarrassing, it took all her courage. Suppose he—

"I'm sorry but I had to come."

She sat on the edge of a bench and began again.

"Mr. Hales, for many hours now I have had you

on my mind." Realising that wasn't right she hastened to supplement:—"As much of a mind as I have, my husband says 'tis little if any."

He assured her that it was only a few minutes since that he had spoken of her as having both wit and beauty to a most unusual degree.

Surprised and grateful, Mrs. Pepys drank in his words.

"Compared to every other woman you transcend them all."

Nicer and nicer!

"I need to hear all you may say!" she exclaimed.

"Half of your charm is in that. And the other half is now being disclosed—now that you have come to a just appreciation of yourself. Madam, till now you have lived but to hide your powers."

"Truth to tell 'tis only now I know I have them!" She settled back a little more comfortably as if to say: "Go on, please!"—

"Ever since I first laid eyes upon you—I that am accustomed to penetrate beneath the skin of them I paint—I knew your powers were there to reveal. And now—now—happy man that I am!"

"And to think I never dreamed!" said she dubiously.

"And to think I never dared!" said he fervently.

A little more of this and then an eloquent silence, broken by Hales seeking for light.

"I know your husband is from home," said he.

"He has been."

"Ah, and now?"

"No, not now."

Her manner was disconcerting for she kept sending glances into the anteroom. Samuel would be certain to come through there in pursuit of her! Any minute now he might arrive! She must keep the painter interested—nay, more, attentive. Samuel must find him her slave, literally at her feet. Even yet she had no more distinct idea than that. The name—John Hales—had set her husband in a frenzy of jealousy. He had sworn to run him through. That being the case, her flight to the studio would give him additional cause. It was a step towards making him drop the wench—that at least she'd bring about!

Hewer, passing her on the stairs, had heard her mutter as she flew: "John Hales—John Hales!" Mercer, wringing her hands, had heard her cry out: "John Hales—John Hales!"

So when the painter observed, after a long puzzled look, that she might have been seen, she answered with all the abandon she could muster:

"What care I? I had a mind to come. I gave the men extra fare to transport me the quicker! Such awful roads! I'm terribly touzed and well nigh seasick, jostled this way and that!"

She arose and walked about the studio, over to the window as though to view his garden, to the door and back—too uneasy to sit still.

Hales, more and more mystified, continued po-

litely probing as to the whereabouts of her husband.

"Laa, Mr. Hales," said she at last, "I beg of you let's not talk of my husband. A husband is one that a wife has by night and by day, in the bed-chamber and in the parlour. He is at hand betimes and always. He can have converse of her when he chooses—over the early morning draft or the late evening supper. Let's not talk of him, I am not here for that."

She let her hood fall from her shoulders and brought her eyes to his with instant result.

"Pretty one that has come to me!—Me that was contemplating going to her!"

Mrs. Pepys could not believe her ears—was it then so easy? Were all men like unto Samuel? Or was she— Lord knows she needed encouragement!

"Upon my honour," he went on, "while I was holding converse with the Lady Lucinda, outwardly assiduous, all the time I was calling up the picture of a dark head, a crown of curls, a dainty head and a radiant face with glowing eyes full of hidden meaning!"

He came nearer and nearer to her, recalling his portrait of her, her pose in it—St. Catherine with her palms and her pearls, his St. Catherine!

"You have thought of me so and always hid it?"

"Even as you did!"

"Ay, ay, but mine was sudden—a sudden thought."

A mixture of feelings were rioting now. She was

delighted, amazed, frightened. Till Samuel appeared she must lead him on and still hold him back. Was ever woman in such a plight?

"From the day you first sat for me," Hales went on, "when I had so much trouble to come at just the right line of your adorable neck;—on the day when your husband wanted you should be done in simple garb, in the dress of an honest housewife so that all that come after us should say—'the wife of Samuel Pepys Esquire!—' That and nothing more!"

He came towards her with arms outstretched—"To this day—"

Time to stop him!

"My husband likes for a woman to go modest," she observed as quietly as she could.

"Ay, verily, so that he may shine the more resplendent!"

Somehow she resented his tone—and yet—

"Mayhap he is in the right—I mean what should I be known for unless for the wife of Samuel Pepys Esquire?"

The arrant coquette! A virtuous woman (supposedly) sitting there with lowered eyes, egging him on!

"You will be known for yourself, my St. Catherine! 'Who was she?' 'What was she?' Some day they'll ask, and the answer will be: 'She it was that John Hales loved,—she that gave him inspiration!' Samuel Pepys will be forgotten. You will live ever,

even as the Mona Lisa of Leonardo has lived all these years."

Lord, if Samuel were to hear that! It would do him a heap of good, but would he credit it? Did she? As a matter of fact she had never heard of the Mona Lisa.

"She was the mysterious lady of Leonardo's heart before ever you and I were born—a wedded wife as you are! She'd found her lover as you have—braved danger for him as you have! She loved one worthy of her—"

Hales came nearer and nearer. She straightened more and more stiffly and plied him with questions as to this Leonardo and his lady. Anything to keep him off—not too far—; to lead him on—not too soon—; and not too near.

Where were his pictures?—Where did he live?—Were there any in London?—

Ever more perturbed she tried to bridge over the time, to keep him in check. Too great his ardour—too sudden! What she wanted to be sure, what she was there to bring about indeed, but the big moment must be reserved for the entrance of her husband.

"Where is he?" she kept asking herself. "Why doesn't he come?"

"I'm glad you made me beautiful," she murmured aloud only to have him still more overwhelming with compliments and protests.

"I have but made you as you are—you don't realise the half of your charm."

She began fencing again, perhaps a bit tediously, with details that he didn't care much about, details of her arrival from France, her early years in England.

"France! Lord, how I long to go back! For a weary time I couldn't get used to it here. Fogs and salt fish; mutton and boiled potatoes!—Ugh—and London smoke! And the dirty narrow streets, so crowded! And the river so black! All's sunshine in France. And the language!"

"'Tis there—the music in your voice!" he cried, reaching for her hand.

"You may believe I hadn't time for much schooling," she went on prosaically, "and had but small training and less of discipline; and we soon had a house and few servants, and much to keep clean; and my husband was fond of things—pictures, books, catalogues."

"I know, I know—tell me of yourself."

"Laa, that's a short story. I have no children, no music—my husband loves music."

All the time Hales coming ever nearer and nearer; she always pulling backward, edging off.

"Yourself!"

"I can draw a little. He once said that the drawings of other women were far short of mine in comparison, but in other matters I lag behind."

He—he—he—no wonder the painter was puzzled!

"Ay, in what my husband calls 'scientific' matters," she explained; "astronomy, for example, and geography."

"What have you to do with such?" he cried at last.

"When one is married and one's husband's eyes tire and one reads to him by night and by day one must try to have a liking for much that is dull. I've tried—I have."

Good Lord, she realised that she was spoiling everything, talking to him as she had so many thousands of times to Samuel!

"Try no more!" He was close to her now.

Suddenly she turned and met the delighted man more than half way though her eyes, indeed, seemed to be elsewhere, on the door—the window—the garden.

"I hear some one!" she cried.

"No, no," said he soothingly. "No one!"

He left her for a minute to reconnoitre, and returning, found her almost in tears. A sweet, frightened lady apparently on her first adventure, needing to be soothed, yet unaccustomed. He tried to take her in his arms. She sprang away declaring again she was sure she heard a step—yes, the step of a man at last! At which, to his amazement, she drew him closer to her, keeping one eye on the door, one on him—ready (if he had but known it!) to

fling herself into his arms—only to sink back disgusted at sight of one Talbot.

Through the door from the anteroom, waving his hat, actually sweeping the floor with its plume, he came bowing and scraping, begging pardon, to a running accompaniment from Hales.

"Faith," said he, and again, "Faith!—Come in" —and again—"Come in."—Meaning: "Stay out, you fool!"

"I jumped on my horse," said Talbot, for the moment apparently regretful to the point of over explanation, "and was about to make the tour when suddenly I observed myself to be without my whip. 'The devil,' said I, 'the devil, one can't ride without a whip.' And then I made note of where I had been all the morning. 'Troth,' said I, 'I was to the rota for a draught and a gossip; up the Mall to my tailor's. Then for a bout with the swords, then here. Zounds,' said I. 'I must return to friend Hales' first'—hesitating only lest I might interrupt the Lady Lucinda at her sitting—with her duenna."

"Not at all—not at all," murmured Hales.

Elizabeth Pepys drew herself up to her full height which was five feet five inches with heels.

Said she: "Mr. Talbot, sir, I am here awaiting my husband."

It was uttered with such conviction, such dignity that Hales himself almost believed her. In any event he backed her up handsomely.

"And as for the Lady Lucinda, she has been here —and is gone but a few minutes since," Mrs. Pepys added haughtily.

Talbot, with his easily discovered whip now in hand, observed gallantly:

"A merry party in which I seem to be *de trop!* I'll hurry along and if I should chance to meet your husband, madam, I'll tell him you await him. Ah, thank you, my friend—"

As he had never stopped bowing and scraping he still kept it up, suggesting everything he had left unsaid.

When finally he sauntered out he left behind, for one of them at least, the intensity of a great moment, the thrill of a secret assignation.

Incredible! Astounding! Adorable! The lady's wit—the lady's courage!

She stood blushing to her ears, the blood pounding at her heart, literally frightened to death, as he poured out his rhapsody of praise.

She had been immensely clever, and now suddenly she was immensely frank. Tremulous in tone, but surprisingly frank.

"You behold a most desperate woman, John Hales. My husband I saw but an hour since in the arms of my servingmaid, Deb Willett. He held her in his arms!—I saw him, and left his house! If I had to do it again I'd do the same. My serv-

ingmaid—an ignorant country wench—has driven me forth out of my own house!"

In faith he had suspected something of the sort! He was glad she knew!

"And you came to me!" That the one thing that mattered.

"To you!"

If only she could stop the clock ticking away the minutes! If only she could still keep him on—and keep him off! If only Samuel would come!

"To me of your own free will," Hales was saying. "I care not how you were driven—my dear love here in my arms!"

He was so close to her now that he must feel her agitation—her heart beating against his. She had certainly invited more and more tenderness, but when he responded with the more and the still more, she drew back in such a panic as to hold him in check.

"When I said but now that I was awaiting my husband," she faltered, "I but stretched a point. He'll be here!"

She seemed now to him actually to mean it—every word of it. That explained her terror!

"He is but detained for the proprieties," she gasped.

He moved a little away from her, and she went on: "If 'twas a dying person he was called for he would still stop for his peruke or his proper hat, or his best waistcoat—he would!" She had in-

creased the distance between them and breathed more calmly.

"But now he's on his way! By my troth, he is!" she said earnestly. "Even now he is racing through the streets, panting and blowing, looking for a hackney—sometimes you cannot come at one on the instant—and so delay upon delay!"

"He knows where you are!" cried Hales still incredulous.

"It took him some minutes to discover it, I trow. But I took care in flying to throw out your name—not once but many times. Out into the hall he followed calling—'Mercer, Mercer!' (My woman that.) If I could only have been by to see his consternation, his dismay! That I should have dared! And that any one should know! 'Let all our doings be private,' says he, 'ever and always.'"

In true home fashion Elizabeth Pepys was now raging up and down the studio. She had thrown discretion to the winds with her hood and her bag, and now went from revelation to revelation in a strange mixture of reticence and loyalty,—one minute defending, the next execrating, swearing her husband loved her, vowing he was unfaithful.

When Hales asked how he had come at his name she told him quite frankly of her writing of it on a bit of paper, of Samuel's discovering it and his rage thereat.

"He thinks that you and I—" cried Hales.

She seemed to corroborate with this: "He threw

me aside and went fuming and foaming to get his sword."

Ah, Samuel was a man, a real man, jealous, that she'd swear to, and of a frightful temper, when he was roused. Small satisfaction but still some.

For a minute Hales seemed to view it differently, but only for a minute. He recovered to listen, smiling when she said:

"He has sworn to kill whoever has taken me from him!"

It was sweet to hear her voice her anxiety! She had flown to him then because she feared for his life, because she thought she knew her Samuel—because she believed him to be a man of reckless courage!

When finally she said: "Do I beg of you stand ready to defend yourself," he had picked up a sword, pulled it from its sheath, and stood ready—but with a mocking laugh on his lips.

"Jealous is he? Jealous and swears revenge! Samuel Pepys indeed!"

She didn't like his tone at all. Somehow it reminded her of certain bits of talk that had fallen from the lips of those women who had but a few days since been her guests.

"Any minute he'll burst through that door—be on your guard, John Hales!"

This dear lady wide-eyed, tremulous—for him—John Hales! It was enough to incite any man to defence!

"You give me courage," he cried, swishing the air back and forth with his thin blade.

She watched him, fascinated, and then blurted out:

"He'd stop at nothing. Oh, we've had scenes—him and me—ere now—and he has a power with men and women."

"Fear not," said Hales soothingly, "your Samuel Pepys who carries a sword has never been known to draw it. While I, my dear one—fear not—I can carry a sword and use it too. See—look—"

No surer way to insure her faith in him than to show her what he could do when put to it—he, a crack pupil of Geronimo, trained of eye and hand—a pupil famous for knowing how to give and how not to receive. Thin, tall, lithe, alert—everything that Samuel was not. Quick as lightning in his movements, he was now on this side, now on that—making more and more savage thrusts, ever intent upon allaying her fears.

"Touché! Touché—"

"No, no, you must not fight," cried she—this time, it seemed to him, in the grip of an unnatural terror.

He smiled at her over his sword and began again.

"And there he lies—a wound in his side—blood on his throat! And now watch!—I slice him into bits!—So, and so!—There and there! He against me? No, no—I'll have him cut and slashed and lying prone! I'll sheathe my weapon in his body!"

She stood crouching with her hands over her eyes, her breath coming almost in sobs, and so pale that she seemed about to faint.

"What is it? Look up. I swear he's no match for me! He'll not harm me, sweet one! If only he might find you thus!"

In his arms he had her at last, yielding—her soft warm body against his, her lips protesting under a shower of kisses.

When finally she broke from him her kerchief was off and her hair, luckily dressed to Samuel's liking and so all her own, falling in ripples to her waist.

"Nay—nay—don't touch me! Leave me be! I am here not for this! You have not understood—all I have said is false—false."

Here was a play indeed! Elizabeth Pepys had done the best acting of her life, and to some purpose. Now she was genuine—herself—pitiful, pleading, also not nearly so attractive.

"If you're the man I take you for you'll help me!"

A torrent of words poured from her trembling lips, picturing all the years of her poor neglected life.

"I am here for my husband," she cried; "not for you!— I am here to make him love me. To keep a husband a wife must have ever another man at her side. 'Tis the law! He must ever be fearful

of another,—'tis the law! Security makes a tyrant of love. Jealousy is a cord that's binding. 'Tis the law—'tis the law!"

Alternating between the tearful protestations of a loving wife and bits of her newly acquired philosophy, she stumbled ignominiously on and on.

"Some day it will be different, it must be. A woman will be able to sit at home, a humble housewife, spinning and saving for the man she loves, and so keep him. But not to-day. In these evil days a woman must go out into the world. She must be seen, admired. How else can she keep such a man as Samuel Pepys?"

There was only one point in all this for John Hales—an obvious one. He stood awkwardly sheathing his sword, probably swearing under his breath.

"I ask your pardon most humbly—" she began. And then, as before, broke off with sudden excitement in a strange mingling of fear and satisfaction.

"H'sh!" said she, raising a warning finger. "I hear steps—he's coming." And with that the most amazing proposition of all fell from her lips. "You'll stand by me"—she cried—"you'll help me?"

Again she drew near to him putting her hand on his shoulder. "For God's sake, help me! For the girl you love," she pleaded. "Listen, John Hales, help me and it will help you with the little lady that left here in a toss. She'll smile upon you

twice as gracious now. 'Tis the law for us women too—else an everlasting monotony is ours—a humdrum existence—dull and stupid. It's for my happiness I'm fighting and none but you and me must ever know—help me—help me!"

As the sound of steps grew more distinct she went nearer and nearer to him, actually into his arms, entreating him.

"Ah—so—hold me—hold me to you, for the love of Heaven—he's here!"

The door burst open and through it came Will Hewer, red of face, breathless, perspiring. His amazement counted for nothing in the intensity of her disappointment. When he began protesting that he couldn't believe his eyes, and pleading with her to take heed, she only grew more indignant. When he told her he had pledged his word to her husband that there was no thought in her mind of John Hales, she vowed she didn't care a threepenny bit what he suspicioned or what he swore.

"He was weeping when I left," cried Hewer, and then went on to describe a most terrible scene unparalleled even in the Pepys household.

"Go back, dear madam, he needs you sore!"

"He knows I'm here? He knows I came alone to John Hales?"

"That and more, he sent me for you."

"He himself made no movement to follow?" she cried indignantly.

"I prevented. And then at first I dared not leave

him. So distraught, so anguished was he! I feared he might turn his sword upon himself! Go back! He's in a fever of repentance! Whatever you demand he'll grant. He bade me say to you—anything—everything!"

"Ah, the absence of the hussy first!"

"Ere I left he cried out to her—'Out of the house! Out of my sight!' All and everything he'll grant you."

Will Hewer stood firmly planted, pleading, urging, determined to get the mistress home.

John Hales, quite obviously disgruntled, had retired to his anteroom. He couldn't be blamed if he felt that his morning had been shamefully wasted.

As for Elizabeth Pepys, she was contrite almost to tears but, for the first time in her married life, not on account of her husband. Her apologies were for John Hales, her concern entirely for him.

She retailed to Hewer, who couldn't make head nor tail of it, how she had burst in uninvited and chased away his dear one; how his dear one must have believed—in faith everything; and how she must somehow convey to her even if she had to go to her house—where she didn't want to go, yet owed it—that everything was otherwise.

No knowing where she might finally have landed if the little Lady Lucinda hadn't taken matters into her own young hands, and decided to return and see for herself how things were progressing.

"At that moment of indecision,"—said Mrs. Pepys when she had a chance to recount it all later—"by a merciful Providence—in she walked from the anteroom, with John Hales at her side!"

Elizabeth glanced at him triumphantly, hoping he'd remember her prediction, but not a sign did he give except that of a delighted man, head over ears in love, credulous even to believing that his fair sitter had returned, as she averred, because she had mislaid her fan!

Broken phrases she let fall about its being a present from her dear mamma. "And so—and because—" Till at last breathlessly: "Now that it is not here I must inform my mamma—"

She was actually turning to go when Elizabeth stopped her.

"One minute," she cried; "I must have a word to Lady Lucinda."

She made no bones about dismissing their host with Will Hewer and relegating the ever attentive duenna to the background. Summoning all her courage she declared she had an important communication to make;—she vowed she owed it for her own sake and for the sake of John Hales.

She came slowly, with much trepidation, to what she had to say. She hesitated to pollute the ears of a child who was of an age to be almost her daughter, with a tale so sordid as hers. Feeling her way

timidly, bent, above all, upon exonerating the painter, she acknowledged haltingly that she was there without his invitation, without even his desire, borne there in a frenzy of jealousy.

She assured the child that she was too young, too innocent to fathom the meaning of so hideous a word. "But sometimes—an unspeakable cause;" —stumbling now with embarrassment she paused.

"Another woman?" said Lucinda lightly.

One could skate more smoothly knowing the child had heard that such existed.

"A creature"—said Mrs. Pepys—"a low woman —one who serves me—my cookmaid."

"Men are men," shrugged Lucinda.

The ice was broken now!

"I left the house mortified, anguished, torn with jealousy."

"Laa, madam!"

"The insult—the shame. But you, dear child, you have naught to fear of me—a lady bred and born."

The little Lucinda looked down at her as though from a great height.

"Mercy on us," she said with a very superior smile, "I was put about because you was a lady!"

Mrs. Pepys was frankly puzzled.

"Ay, madam, if one I loved left me for a lady I'd be jealous—but for a no-account baggage—" She shrugged her pretty shoulders and went on com-

placently. "He'd soon tire of her. Men are men! For all of my concern a husband of mine might have a dozen such."

"You would not mind?"

"The only lasting passion is for a lady," said Lucinda positively. "Tell me again there's naught 'twixt you and John Hales."

Nothing easier! But not to spoil all she added: "For certain reasons I ask that Mr. Hales make pretence to admire me. You'll not begrudge me that?"

Lucinda sat looking at her frowning as though trying to understand that there lived a woman who could resist John Hales.

"I'd ne'er have believed it," she said over and over.

"I mind me of a time—" Mrs. Pepys began, but no—those love days were still sacred. Instead she said: "You must watch out for him."

"Indeed I know it—he's worth while," said Lucinda proudly.

Now, for the first time, Mrs. Pepys heard of Nell Gwyn's visit, how the child had come upon her.

"Nell Gwyn, the favourite that I've seen on the stage from behind my vizard! To meet her face to face! The encounter will set the Lady Jane and Lady Margaret by the ears with envy! And she called him 'John'—and he protested he scarce knew her! Wicked John—no paragon of virtue he!" She prattled on, gurgling with delight.

"They say the King"— The maiden, a bundle of smiling youth, lowered her voice to give the details full value.

When John Hales and Hewer were summoned back from the anteroom Mrs. Pepys was saying: "I see you have studied history."

"Yes, madam, and the Bible," said Lucinda softly after a moment.

Her eyes were on the ground; her duenna had approached to her side and the painter stood looking at her with the delighted approving smile of a lover reading in the blushing face of the girl who is to be his wife, her seventeen years of innocence.

Said Mrs. Pepys presently: "Will Hewer, have you ever known my husband in any intrigue save with a woman of the town—a creature of no account?"

To this Hewer answered: "Never!"

"No lady ever?" persisted Mrs. Pepys.

"Never—never."

"And never long dallying with one, but sweet to many," said Mrs. Pepys reflectively.

Then after a long pause: "Mayhap his only lasting passion will be for a lady."

With that she returned to the house of Samuel Pepys.

CHAPTER XIV

SAMUEL refused to come out of his closet. Sulking he was no doubt, and sore at heart—even suffering. She hoped so—he deserved it. Lord! hadn't she—over and over, time and again—

For once in her life she had the upper hand. She clenched her fingers determined to hold on to the bitter end.

Hewer, more concerned than ever before, had need of all his courage. No pleasant task his to beard these raging lions in their dens.

In the master's closet he ventured as far as he dared in one direction. In the mistress's—

It was the mistress's turn now. She scarcely spoke, just sat looking at him, evidently determined to listen patiently to whatever he had to say.

"At the 'Swan' they speak shocking things of you, madam, you that was always reputed to be quiet, demure, modest. They shrug and shrug and hem and haw."

So strange her mood that she seemed not to realise the disgrace of being gossiped about in a tavern!

"They say your husband is jealous. They recall tales of the past. They say you have driven him to

what he is. The man Pembleton, it seems, has boasted, and it is known you have received her—Nell Gwyn—you, the wife of Samuel Pepys!"

When her eyes were not scornful it was because she was nodding and smiling. Poor man, he had often been perplexed before but never like this! He had brought forth every argument he could think of. Again he referred to the master in his room—alone and sad.

To which with infinite sarcasm she echoed: "Sad is he? And why?"

"That you should have read in his journal only such bits as are frivolous—that you should have passed by the serious parts."

"Oh, he finds fault with me, does he?"

"Much of the rest is history, madam—great history—writ by a great man—history that will live."

"Will it? We'll see!"

The wife of Samuel Pepys had become a person.

For a brief hour she gloried in the delicious feeling of uplift, exaltation, triumph; the sort of thing called walking on air.

"You have him now!"

She seemed to hear Nell's voice ringing praises in her ears—Nell who wouldn't have him at any price! And the others—the things those women had insinuated! Perhaps his turning to Deb Willett was due to a foolish pride, to something different from sensuous desire—perhaps—

Good God, let her keep some of her illusions!

She held her head high, her eyes far above Will Hewer's, determined not to see the look of concern on his face. Instead she noted how many black stains there were on the ceiling.—Samuel must have the painters in—Samuel—

The dear mistress, gloriously beautiful, biting her lips, smiling to keep up her courage—Hewer knew! God help her—and God help the master!

Mercer, a new Mercer, deferential, submissive, mysterious, even awe-stricken, appeared at the door announcing a visitor.

The Lord be praised! The master would feel better now that his friends were beginning to come. Will Hewer on his way to him with the news, paused.

The woman had her hands behind her back. She brought them forward now, holding out a nosegay, averring she had been bidden to present it with the compliments and respects of Mr. Somersett.

Somersett! Her lady's chin went a degree higher into the air!

"And Mr. Somersett asked if he might have the pleasure of seeing the madam. And, madam, Mr. Jones and Mr. Talbot are below. And, madam, they desire to have converse with you. And, madam, they beg to have conveyed to you this, and this."

Nosegays—three of them! Mrs. Pepys took

them, glowing. Never had flowers seemed sweeter to the eyes of a woman—roses in paper crowns, marigolds, sweet marjoram, stiff and beautiful.

A bit flustered, like any true woman she ran to the mirror adjusting an escaping curl, rubbing her fingers up and down her cheeks to put more colour into them, moistening her lips, deploring the fact that she was not better dressed. She asked the usual questions.—Had Tom shown them up? Were the curtains drawn? Did they all come together? Had they asked for the master?

"In the parlour, madam, they stand before your portrait, full of praise for the beauty of it."

For once Mercer was actually prodigal of news. "Is the madam at home? Is the madam alone? Is Mr. Samuel Pepys Esquire abroad?"

Mercer did her best to chase all expression from her face as she quoted their questions.

Hewer hovered speechless.

Below waited the guests.

A glorious, triumphant, enchanting smile lifted the corners of the mistress's lips. Hewer at last found his voice and his wits.

"Madam, the master is sick," said he.

"Sick! By all that's wonderful and past belief!" she cried, her eyes flashing with unmistakable scorn.

"Madam, the master is in bed from it," he said simply. "His dreams of parliament crushed, his name dishonoured."

That was all. Mercer held her breath. Eliza-

beth Pepys held hers too—to keep it from breaking into a sob.

At last she turned slowly. The smile had died; the head was lowered; the eyes were dimmed. She brushed aside the picture of Nell cracking her sides with laughter, and renounced her hour of triumph.

With great dignity, almost imperiously, she turned to the waiting woman.

"Mercer, convey to the gentlemen your lady's compliments, and say she is with her husband, and will housewarm with him on Thursday next—St. Andrew's Day."

She heard Samuel at his door;—it had been ajar all the time. There was some consolation in that.

CHAPTER XV

HUMPED up in an old gown, shorn of wig, bare of pomp, red of face, frankly tearful, Samuel Pepys sat at his desk fingering a pen.

There was a time when his wife, contemplating him, would have deemed it proper to apply the word repentant. Her vocabulary was more exact now.

Without excitement she listened to an explosion of good words and fair promises. He had presented an army of old ones and exhausted a reserve of new ones. He had tried pleading, coaxing, wheedling. For repentant she had substituted the word powerless—his back was against the wall and he knew it.

Declaring he had never admired his wife more, he burst into an avalanche of compliments, fulsome, extravagant. And on them at last he found a tortuous way back to self-respect. The little woman whom he had been at such pains to educate had responded to his training superbly. His wife! His wife! Her magnificent gesture called for another, equally magnificent.

He straightened, picked up his pen with a flourish and wrote furiously. Finally he summoned Will Hewer from the shadowy background.

"Here," he said with grave dignity as though he were granting some one an annuity, "here under my hand I have writ that I hated her, and I have called her the name of all others that one calls a woman one is to see never more again. Read!"

Will Hewer read out slowly. "Never will I see or speak with Deb Willett again while I live, as never will I see Pierce or Knepp, or any other wench or hussy."

"As Heaven is my witness," said Samuel solemnly.

Upon that there fell a silence, broken by him this time huskily. "If I can master this bout, never will I give my dear wife occasion for complaint while I live, or more trouble of this or any other kind."

The phrases tickled her ears nicely and she tried to believe that he meant every word. He was certainly more sincere than ever before in his life. She crossed noiselessly over the thick rug and stood beside Will Hewer.

"But would it not be well that it should be even more a piece of our league," said she, "that for a time, at least, my husband should go abroad no more alone? Write down:—'With him everywhere should go his wife or Will Hewer.' Will Hewer being privy to all this as one that loves us—he does love us—faithful Will Hewer!"

The touch of her hand as she took his set him trembling.

"Ay, ay, all this I'll write and do," said Samuel,

nodding and nodding. All that and more he promised. "If only it may go forth that it was not my wife being abroad with other men that brought me to it."

Samuel petitioning—not even bargaining! A child in his eagerness to be forgiven—a man in his desire to appear right with the world.

"Trust me to see to that," she answered quietly.

Her demands complied with, she felt incomprehensibly sad—as though she were thrusting aside for ever the mantle that had once invested him, if not with dignity, at least with power,—tearing it away, bit by bit, and revealing beneath it layer upon layer of weaknesses.

"Then, by the grace of God," he cried, "I promise to offend no more in conduct nor in writing!"

So again they came to the journal. Again she faced it with flaming eyes—reproachful, indignant, incredulous.

She heard again it was largely a record of his days—it was history for the future—it was for the love of writing—it was a work for posterity—for reference.

Excuses, make-shifts, evasions. Unconvinced and unsatisfied she listened.

In the back of her head, from the mess and maze of his stuff a bit here, a bit there stood out suggesting, tantalising, and back of them galloped memory —unconscious memory of dates and days, and happenings;—memory of unimportant matters—mem-

ory as to a day in April last, for instance, a recent date—April 16! In his journal he certainly had made an error. She remembered quite differently. —That day she and Samuel had gone together to settle a bill;—Unthanke her tailor had made an overcharge. On that day Samuel—Lord! he had been with her—had accompanied her and so he couldn't—

She looked at him deeply and suddenly blurted out—"Is it true?"

"True? True?" he demurred.

Once he would have replied by hurling back at her,—"You poor wretch—you poor fool!" Hewer knew and so did she.

Now he only echoed her word faintly, seeming to shrink in his chair, as though anxious to evade what must follow. He waited long—long enough for Hewer to make pretence of being called away on sudden business—long enough for his wife to repeat the question.

"Is it true, all that's writ there?" And again, "Is it true? Tell me?"

He lifted his brows and looked at her sideways; lowered his glance, then looked again. No way of escape. He rose from his chair and went up the room swaggering—followed by relentless eyes. He must have felt them through his back. Gradually his lips broadened, his face grew several degrees redder.

"Indeed I have done more in its pages," he whispered sheepishly, "than ever I did in life!"

Then when she went on emphasising her right to question, quoting ruthlessly, he stopped her in the uncertain tone of one hoping but for mercy,—ready to acknowledge or confess anything.

With his eyes on the loose sheets, that held the damning evidence of his words, he cried:

"Things that I ne'er accomplished I dreamed of there."

"Dreamed?"

The colour in his wife's cheeks was beginning to match his own.

Groping about, more and more uncomfortable, he found at last some one to blame.

"The devil," said he, "the devil that is in me lured me on."

"The worst of it then?" she breathed—

As he hoped God would forgive him he swore that the parts that would offend her most were invention.

"What I might have done," said he, shaking his head sadly, "the devil I might have been, but never was."

And she? Suddenly the fire within her seemed to flicker and die. How could she have believed all this of one who so loved the comfort and warmth of home?—Samuel who was afeared to catch cold if he changed too suddenly from long trousers to

short ones?—Samuel whom she had seen driven into a sweat till he almost melted to water at a noise?—Samuel, whose bark had ever been so much worse than his bite—bragging of his dallyings and desires—raging and swearing in his jealous fits—bluster-ing as to what he would do and then not doing it—

Slowly his infidelities evaporated; she looked at him with the first glimmer of a smile. Hewer re-turned to bask in it. Samuel straightened. She nodded and made the first overture. What if she gave over and his journal should be preserved—what if perhaps some one should come across it—in another fire or another plague—

To all of which he exclaimed:—"Never, never!" many times. A record it was, trivial only in spots—a serious document, the most of it. He called Hewer and Heaven to witness.

"All the same," said she, "so that I may not go down into history as the poor wife, the poor wretch, the poor fool—I would that you should write in it of our early days, of Pembleton that knelt to me when it was not called for in the dance—nay, verily;—and of the attentions of Lord Sandwich and his son; and of your jealousy of Lieutenant Lee that kissed my hand; and of him that gave me a bracelet of rings."

"Ay, a pretty, neat black man, Captain Holmes! I remember I showed him no great countenance to discourage him."

Samuel had the most amazing way of blurting

out the truth with an air that seemed to say: "Think what you will, I'll brazen it through."

But she was not to be put off.

"I beg you make note of him in your journal book," said she, "and of them that thought you had a great beauty for a wife and toasted me at the time that I was beset by the solicitations of Captain Ferrers, and of Lord Hinchingbroke, even to the trouble of his lady."

"By this hand—my writing hand," said Samuel Pepys, "I take my oath I will. When I enter the loose pages that have lain waiting these two years past, I'll set down that, I swear, and more."

A mighty attractive woman, his wife! Mighty attractive with her dark hair, trim figure—by the Lord, she was handsomer than the day he married her—a woman grown and no fool!

Full of the eagerness of atonement he swore to write himself down as deadly full of jealousy.

"I'll confess to how I listened at the keyhole to see if you were dancing all the time! You never knew it but I did!"

"I suspicioned it, Samuel."

He looked at her curiously as though she were a new discovery. "It was in our early days together," said he, "the days when I walked more in fear of the Lord; when my poor wife, for love of me, rose at five o'clock in the morning, before day, and went to market and bought fowls and many other things for dinner."

The shadow in the background became more and more indistinct and finally faded away on tip-toe.

Samuel and his wife were alone.

Elizabeth shivered, remembering how bitter cold it was in those first early days.

"You sat up all night to make mince pies," he said softly.

She remembered above all that she had burned her hand and that he had kissed it. Not all bad, Samuel; consciously he would never have been cruel to her.

"If God should reduce us to it would she do the same again? Would she?"

"She would, poor wretch," came softly from his wife's lips.

"Of all the world only you and I know how poor I was, how I was forced to sneak like a beggar for want of clothes—so ashamed of my shabbiness that when I wished to speak to men I didn't like to do so, my linen was so dirty and my clothes so mean; and my wife used to wash with her own hands for me, for which, God knows, I ought forever to love and admire her."

With a sigh that was for all women she said: "As never no husband does."

And then to his protestations she went on: "Nay, not in this day. This is an advanced age. Men are two different creatures, husbands and men—one for home and one for abroad. You that are so brave

without, so fine, so great a hero in the plague and in the fire—Samuel, you will be remembered for that and for your service to the King. You will take your seat in Parliament—Samuel Pepys Esquire! His wife will live through him, the little woman that kept his house."

"Nobly! Nobly!"

By this time he had slipped his large hand over her plump soft one, enveloping it completely. She thrilled—tried to recover—failed. Nell Gwyn and those beasts of women, she longed for all time to strangle them—every one!

Samuel was saying, "We'll go abroad beyond seas together, into Holland where I have long wanted to journey, and when we return—"

It was a hazardous journey to Holland, over seas. Would all be the same she wondered—vows, promises, resolutions? After this crisis, the greatest in their lives, would they ever go back, begin all over again with suspicions, fears, jealousies, reproaches?

"A new life," breathed Mrs. Pepys.

"And by my troth," said Pepys, "no writing ever again of any happenings on either side, and much contained therein at present to be considered."

A long, long pause. Samuel released her hands.

"And much destroyed," she put in gently as he went striding up and down the room, evidently resolving something most important.

"Only," said he at last, "it must go forth in after

years that I stopped my journal of my own will."

Again his overwhelming desire to maintain a semblance of strength! His wife looked at him full of sympathy, but this time she confessed herself powerless.

She was willing, but would any one believe that without pressure he had stopped the writing of that which he most loved—stopped forever and all? Nay, nay, incredible! He remained thoughtful. His wife was a woman of sense. She was right without question. He told her that and much more that pleased her before he said with great deliberation:

"I'll lay it to the ill condition of my eyes. God knows there is proof and enough that they are a sore trouble to me!"

"Poor dear Samuel," she cried impulsively, "our trip abroad will cure them!"

He disregarded the suggestion to say—"I'll give it out with a noble sentence, thus—"

He took up his pen, and for a time scratched steadily, unhesitatingly. Evidently it was to be something extremely worth while.

At last he read aloud to her this:

"And so ends all that I doubt I shall ever be able to do with my eyes in the keeping of my journal. And therefore I betake myself to that course which is almost as much as to see myself going to my grave, for which, and all the discomforts that accompany being blind, the good God prepare me."

Blind! Samuel Pepys, the faithful servant of the nation and the King,—the Navy's right hand, stricken, bowing to the will of his Almighty God,—flung from high fortune into black darkness!

Mulling over the picture he had forgotten that his wife existed until he felt her arms about him and found himself looking up into eyes now swimming with tears. She drew his head to her beating heart, smoothed his thinning hair back with trembling fingers,—her strong masterful man bowled over, helpless, dependent, groping.

After all she had never had any other child.

"She bore no children because she could have borne none to equal her."

This in Latin on her tombstone in St. Olave's Church in Hart Street, where she was buried before the end of the year.

And beneath it:

Having journeyed by pleasant ways nearly over all Europe,
She is gone again to review a lovelier world.

Obiit 10 Novembris
ANNO { Ætatis 29
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